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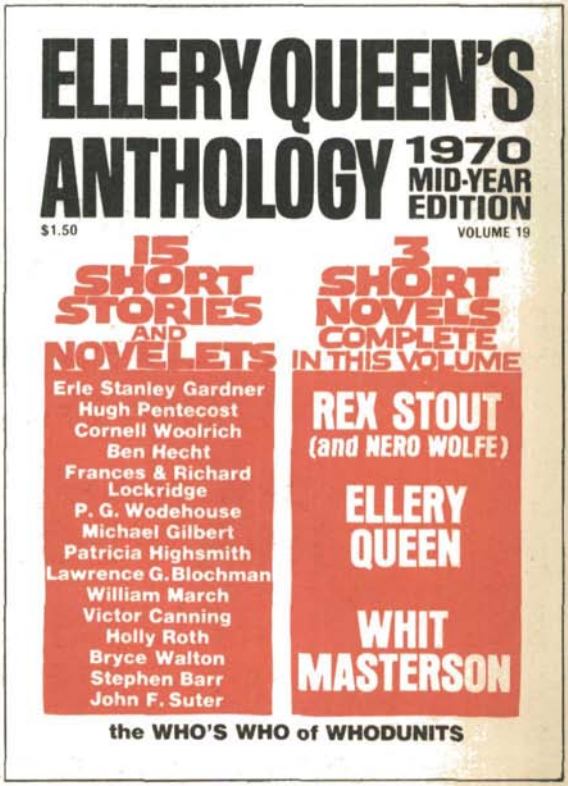

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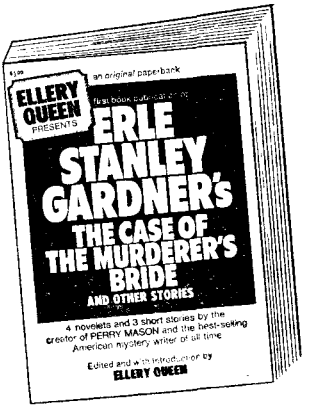
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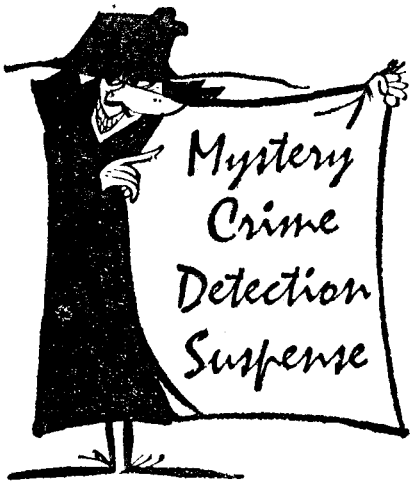

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 55, No. 6, Whole No. 319, JUNE, 1970. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 60¢ a copy. Annual subscription $7.00 in U.S.A., and possessions and Canada; $8.00 in the Pan American Union; $8.00 in all other countries. Editorial and General Offices, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N. Y. 10003. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions and other mail items are to be sent to 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N. Y. 10003. Office of Publication —1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. 01040. Second-Class postage paid at Holyoke, Mass. 01040. *© 1970 by Davis Publications, Inc., All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

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Is it possible for a contemporary writer to come up with a new species of detective? Surely, after all these years (129 since Poe's Dupin, 83 since A. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes), every type of vocational or avocational background for a detective, amateur or professional, has been thought of and used—the list is legion. But how true it is that we sometimes do not see the forest for the trees, or the trees for the forest. Staring us all in the face, from within the police department itself, is a new variety—at least, a subspecies new to EQMM. Here, for the first time in our memory, is a detective story featuring a meter maid as the sleuth.

Happy reading—and never again will you look upon a meter maid as a mere checker of parking violations . . .

METER MAID MEETS MURDER

by THOMAS MILLSTEAD

"SOPHIE! HOLD IT!"

The husky man in the crewcut loped up, groping in his pocket. Meter maid Sophie Rorick ignored him. Her ballpoint pen flew swiftly over the bright red ticket.

"I was only gone a minute, Soph. To get change for the meter. And, after all, I am a—"

"So you're a cop, Floyd. You're off duty. You've got to pay a nickel an hour to park here, just like anyone else. If you don't, you pay a three-dollar fine like anyone else. An off-duty cop has got a lot of people watching to see if he's getting away with anything. Steve always used to say that."

She held his big right hand, palm up, slapped a ticket into it, and smiled.

"How's the family, Floyd?"

"Okay, Soph."

"You say hello to the missus for me. She's some bowler. The best in our league."

"Okay, Soph." He smiled ruefully.

Sophie resumed her measured pace down the four-hundred block of Sixth Street, scanning every parking meter for the telltale red flag that indicated expired time. But not stopping there. Taking

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in, too, every car parked at every meter. The make, the condition, the license plate. Casually, hardly conscious of it—but taking it all in. It was a habit she'd picked up from Steve Rorick, her late husband. Sergeant Steve Rorick of the Detective Bureau.

A tall man bounded out of the Blodgett Building—at five stories the city's highest business structure—and swerved past her.

"Slow down, Mr. Beyer. I see you've got ten minutes left on your meter."

Attorney Tom Beyer's wide mouth tilted slightly. "I wasn't worried about that, Sophie. Got to pick up my wife at the shopping center."

"How are her African violets doing?"

"She wanted to ask you about them. There are little scratches, like scars, on the undersides of the leaves."

"Probably thrips. The best thing for that—"

"You come over soon and tell her. I've got to pick up Bernice before she buys out the place."

Beyer was a gaunt giant with melancholy features that even now, in his mid-fifties, made him look like a sensitive boy who has just suffered his first punch in the mouth from life. His crop of still sandy hair flopped low on his forehead so that, Sophie thought, any woman would want to brush it back gently with a "there, there, everything's all right." He wore a patch-pocketed corduroy jacket and green slacks that shone like neon.

Beyer pulled open the door of his fastback compact, his "second car," Sophie knew, used for runabout errands. "Some vacation," he said. "We should've gone off somewhere. This way I keep running down to the office for an hour or so every day. And being a chauffeur for my wife the rest of the time." His long face creased again in a grin. He slammed the door and backed out quickly, his directional lights flashing a right turn. At the corner he turned left.

Well, Sophie thought, when a man earned the kind of fees Tom Beyer did, his mind had to be more on lawbooks than on his driving. She consulted her watch. 10:30. Time for her ten-minute coffee break. Ten minutes and no more.

She stepped into Hymie's Lunch, patting down a few strands of the hair under her visored cap. Only a few. She kept her hair shorter now and she knew it was no longer the flaming red it had once been. Streaks of gray had muted it, streaks she didn't try to hide. Still, there was enough crimson to contrast sharply with her smart blue uniform. They set each other off nicely, those colors. Steve used to say that, too, when she'd lay her head against his blue-coated chest.

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She was plumper now than when Steve was alive. The steady walking hadn't had the reducing effect she'd hoped for. And her face was no longer so pale or fragile as in that quarter-century-old wedding picture. But the years had etched in the lines unobtrusively and her eight hours a day outdoors had rubbed in a ruddy glow. And she still felt the pride and perkiness she'd known when Steve waltzed his little slip of a bride around the room and whispered, "Well, Soph, you're a cop's wife now!"

They hadn't had meter maids when Steve died. But two years later they got them organized —parkettes, they called them at first—to free regular patrolmen from some of their routine chores. Sophie had volunteered at once.

"One cup comin' up," said Hymie as she took a seat at the counter. "Cream but no sugar for the lady of the law. How many guys you sock it to today, Sophie?"

"Running about average so far, Hymie."

"You caught old Andrews fair and square yesterday," said a secretary at the end of the counter.

"Good thing you weren't around to hear what he said," chuckled a clothing salesman, nibbling a doughnut.

"I've heard it before," Sophie smiled. Except for a few women shoppers, the clientele was almost all coffee-break regulars—business people, professional people, clerks who worked in the block.

"Want a refill, Sophie?"

"Please. It's better than ever today."

"Katharine makes good coffee all right."

"I wish she'd teach my wife," said the clothing salesman. "I'd like to come down to the kitchen in the morning and find something like this."

"I'd like to come down in the morning," said a fat-faced shoe clerk, "and find something like Katharine."

Hymie's thick brows and pendulous lips bent into a scowl. "Hey, watch it. She can hear you." He glanced furtively at the swinging door to the kitchen. He was a big-boned man with a bald, bulbous head and forearms bristling with tattoos that were all but lost in thickets of matted hair.

"So what?" said the shoe clerk. "She's got it and she knows it."

"Nix with that stuff, I tell you." Again Hymie looked anxiously at the kitchen.

"Listen, they should talk like that about me behind my back," said the secretary.

Sophie smiled. She knew Katharine. The cook was a buxom woman in her late thirties with bronzed features and black hair down to her shoulders. And a

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slit-eyed way of looking and a feline way of moving. She had a notorious tendency to dent her own ten-year-old sedan and the vulnerable areas of any other car unfortunate enough to park in her vicinity. But, never flustered, she left every encounter as enigmatically aloof as ever. And being severe with her was difficult for Sophie's male colleagues.

"How 'bout a cruller, Sophie?"

"No, thanks, Hymie. It takes me twenty blocks to walk one of them off."

"Hey, the sugar bowl's empty, Hymie."

"Okay. Gimme it."

Hymie unscrewed the lid from the bowl, pushing the kitchen door open with his bull shoulders.

"No! No, no, no . . ."

His wail trailed off into blubbery moans. The customers froze. Someone's spoon dropped and clattered noisily against a saucer. Sophie slid off her stool and strode briskly around the counter. She swung the door aside and asked, "What is it, Hymie?"

Then she saw what it was.

The cook was sprawled across the linoleum floor of the cramped kitchen, face down, her white uniform and outflung raven hair sopping up the blood. A red-flecked butcher knife was at her feet. Hymie tried to turn her over.

"Katharine. Katharine—"

"Don't touch her," Sophie commanded.

Hymie knelt in a congealing puddle of maple syrup. More of it dripped, like life slowly ebbing, onto the floor from an unbroken bottle fallen across the griddle. A head of lettuce rested near the knife, its leafy shreds tracing the two-foot distance the head had rolled after hitting the floor. A twisted bouquet of tulips half covered the bare brown calves of the woman's legs.

The customers shoved tentatively now against the door. "Don't come in!" said Sophie. "Go back and wait by the counter. But nobody leave! Hymie, you wait here—and don't touch anything!"

"You can go now, Sophie," said Police Lieutenant Cletus Moran. She'd accompanied him back to his office from the Interrogation Room. The rest of Hymie's customers had been questioned and released.

"Nothing, Cletus?"

"Not from them. I'm holding Hymie for further questioning. You can go now, Sophie."

"Do you know what time she died?"

Moran sighed, loosened his tie, and struggled out of his coat. This hadn't been necessary since the air conditioning had been installed. But he still wasn't used to a coat in the office. It seemed to stifle him. He rolled up his sleeves and picked up a report.

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"About a half hour before she was found, give or take a couple minutes. Sometime between nine forty-five and ten fifteen."

"No physical clues at all?"

Moran sighed again. A bachelor, he'd been best man at Sophie's and Steve's wedding. Steve had been his best friend. They'd started on the force together. There was a faded snapshot of the two of them framed on the wall behind his desk. They were a peculiar combination. Steve—tall and adroit, poised and handsome; Cletus—stocky and sweaty, ugly and pugnacious. After Steve's death Moran had tried to look out as best he could for Sophie. He'd helped get her the meter maid job.

"Not much, Sophie. Stabbed once in the throat. It must've been quick. No fight. Hardly anything got knocked down or thrown around, just the syrup bottle and the lettuce. And those flowers. Tossed down on her. Taken out of the vase and tossed down on her."

"Almost as if in farewell."

"I don't know about that. Customers heard nothing funny. There's usually some rattling or bumping around or talking back there. The handle on the knife was wiped clean. No other prints around that we could find. He might've got some blood on himself, the killer. But we're not even sure of that. Must've got in through the back door. It gives on the alley. Anybody who knows the place can just walk in. And would know they'd find the Kavalis woman there alone."

"Except maybe for Hymie?"

"Yeah. But that time of day Hymie's usually serving coffee. And the cook's getting ready for the noon rush. There's no need for Hymie to be in and out of the kitchen till later. Or so he tells me. The guy seems pretty broken up."

"But you're holding him."

"For more questioning."

"That's all?"

"So far." Moran's rheumy eyes—always red-rimmed as though he hadn't slept in days—fixed intently on her. "Sophie, we've talked about this before. Because you're wearing a blue uniform and because you're a legitimate part of the police department doesn't mean that—"

"So it gets down to motive."

Moran sank back in his chair. A finger the size and texture of a frankfurter began stripping the wrapper from a cigar.

"Motive. Uh huh."

Sophie, arms folded, leaned forward. "She hadn't been here long, had she?"

"Two years. Came from Chicago. Divorced. Lived with her son. He's eighteen. We're trying to find him. She worked as a cook at Stumpf's, the other side

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of town, before Hymie hired her eight months ago."

"Motive, Cletus."

"You've seen her. What kind of motive would you look for, a woman like that?"

"Men?"

"Damn right. Well, you must be tired, Sophie. Awful thing for you to get mixed up in. And I got things to do."

"Questioning Hymie some more?"

"Yeah."

"Let's go then."

Lieutenant Moran sighed again. For the third time in ten minutes.

Hymie's beefy arms hung loosely at his sides. His eyes were lost in their deep-set sockets. Sophie noticed that his white trousers, stained as usual by coffee and butter and eggs, now bore spots of red at the cuff. She touched his shoulder quickly and smiled.

Moran scowled. "I see you got a manslaughter rap on your record. I didn't know that. Pulled time for it."

"A fight in a bar. The guy died."

"You ever fight with Kavalis? Ever hit her?"

"Katharine? Never!"

"When was the last time you saw her alive?"

"I dunno. I just hadn't been in the kitchen for a while. A half hour or so. Before I went back for the sugar. But I guess it was just after the breakfast rush let up. When I told her how good her omelettes were today. And how pretty the flowers were."

"Those tulips?"

"Yeah."

"Hymie, where had she put them?" Sophie asked.

"Next to the coffeemaker. She never had flowers in the kitchen before."

"Did she—"

Moran interrupted. "Anything different about her today?"

"Different? Well, she was crying."

"When?"

"Oh, off and on all morning. I never seen her cry before. I asked her what was wrong."

"What'd she tell you?"

"Nothin'."

"How'd you get the blood on your pants?"

"It must've been when I found her and stooped over her."

"It wasn't there before?"

"No!"

"Your customers wouldn't see it, you behind the counter."

"What'd you mean?"

"I mean if you already had the blood on your pants, the smart thing would be to go back in the kitchen and stamp around the body and claim you got it then."

"Are you sayin'—"

Sophie touched Hymie's shoulder again. "You'd dated Katharine, didn't you?"

"Some."

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"Lately?" Moran asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because she didn't want to. Because she didn't have time for me."

"Who'd she have time for?"

Hymie dropped his head. His huge hands kneaded his glistening skull.

"You know one of 'em. Tom Beyer. Mister Big-Shot lawyer. The other one I don't know his name. I tried to find out. She wouldn't tell me."

"The times you dated her —"

A plainclothesman beckoned Moran. "We grabbed the woman's kid, Cletus. He just knifed a guy. The guy's not in good shape."

Moran snapped his head around to glare at Sophie.

"You are not coming along. Understand? Not coming! Charlie, wait'll I get my coat!"

"Hymie," said Sophie, "I'll buy you a cup of coffee and a cruller. And you can tell me about Katharine."

Marie Pender, secretary of the law firm of Beyer and Tyson, was another bowling buddy. As Sophie entered the fourth-floor suite of offices, Tom Beyer brushed by her.

"Oh. I'm overtime at the meter?"

"I just came to see Marie."

"I'm off then. Got to get away from here for some part of my vacation. Oh, say —"

Towering above her, he stroked his long jaw while the pause lengthened.

"Terrible. About what happened at Hymie's. Terrible." And then he left.

Marie didn't let Sophie bother to fabricate an excuse for dropping by. She was too eager to hear the details.

"And you actually saw her there? What was it like? Oh, don't worry. Mr. Tyson's out for the afternoon, too.'"

Sophie told her what it was like, all the while peering through the half-opened door to Beyer's office. Old-fashioned mahogany desk, overstuffed chairs, a painting of a Far West waterfall, another of wild geese against an autumn sky.

"So they questioned all of us who were at the counter, then let us go."

"Oh, they're checking everybody," said Marie. "They were even up here asking Mr. Beyer and me where we were between nine forty-five and ten fifteen."

"And you were both right here?"

"'Oh, yes. Mr. Beyer had his door open and I saw him all that time. Then his wife called about ten thirty and asked to be picked up."

"It was his wife who called?"

"Oh, yes. I know her voice."

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"And he didn't stir out of his office all that time?"

"Not between nine forty-five and ten fifteen."

"Pretty flowers on your desk, Marie."

"Mr. Beyer buys them, every couple of days. Or gives me the money to buy them, rather. He says it makes the clients feel good the minute they walk in."

"Are they usually tulips?"

"Always. They're the only ones he likes."

"You bought these?"

"No, he did. He brought them up yesterday. My goodness, you sound like your friend Lieutenant Moran."

Sophie smiled her sweetest. "It's all those years with Steve. A lot of it rubbed off on me."

"You've been advised of your rights, Mark?" asked Cletus Moran.

The youth nodded. Mark Kavalis was thin as a rail, but a scruffy pair of white jeans clung so tightly to him they might have been a size too small. He wore cowboy boots, a purple T-shirt, and a golden medallion on a chain around his neck. He had his mother's high cheekbones, long-lidded eyes, and jet hair. It hung, as hers had, to the shoulders, and his sideburns descended to the delicate line of his jawbone. His handsome mouth drooped, in petulance or shock or fatigue.

"All right, boy, you've admitted stabbing this bartender at the Shady Nook. Vincent Unger. And you were seen by witnesses. Now I just want to know why."

Moran put the question quietly. Two other plainclothesmen flanked him in the Interrogation Room.

"I'm waiting, Mark." No answer.

"You go to school?" asked one of the other men.

"No."

"You work?"

"No."

"You live off your Ma?"

"Sure."

"You and she scrap a lot?"

"Sure. All the time."

"Did she ever cry, Mark?"

"Wait a minute!" Moran yelled. "Who asked that —" He whirled around. "Sophie! Who let you in here?"

"The door wasn't locked, Cletus."

"This is not—I can't allow—" Moran glowered, then thrust his knobby chin and flattened nose directly into Mark's face.

"I want to know why you knifed Unger. Had he been out with your mother?"

"Sure! Damn him! And ready to move in! And she was going to let him! Damn her!"

"Did you knife her, too?"

The boy's rage subsided. He stared blankly.

"Did you?"

Slowly he shook his head.

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"You hated her, didn't you? Running around with men all the time. And Unger wasn't the first. Didn't you hate her?"

Mark shot from the chair. "Yes! Those damn men of hers! That lawyer! Unger! Sure, I hated her!"

"And so you stabbed her?"

He began weaving. His eyes rolled in his head. Moran grabbed him. "Are you on something? Pot? Acid?"

The boy's head moved from side to side. He eased back into the chair.

"You loved your mother, didn't you?" Sophie asked.

Mark's head turned until his eyes found the kindly-looking woman with the copper-colored bangs.

"You just wanted the two of you to stay together and be happy."

Mark nodded.

"Did she ever cry when you two fought?"

"No. Her? She never cried. Never. Not over me. Not over anything."

"Did you kill her?" Moran persisted.

The boy's lips trembled. He bit them. "No."

"You thought Unger did?" Moran asked.

Mark nodded.

"Why?"

"He'd beat her up. He was mean. I didn't see her last night. She was out with him. Then, today, when I heard . . ."

"Heard what, Mark?"

"When I heard what happened to her I knew he did it. She must've told him to leave her alone. I don't know what. But I know he did it. So I went over and I stabbed him."

"Where were you this morning? Nine forty-five to ten fifteen."

"Home."

"Alone?"

"Yeah."

"You weren't there when we came looking."

"I took the jalopy out. About ten thirty, eleven. I heard about it on the car radio."

Moran bit off the end of a cigar. His inflamed eyes were almost shut. "Your pals ever needle you? You living at home with your mother? Depending on her for money?"

Mark paused. "Yeah. Sure."

"Enough so you'd had it with her? You admitted you hated her."

"He indicated, Cletus, that he loved her."

Moran sighed, again.

"Will you *please*, Sophie, go home? Please?"

"Cletus, why don't you come over for dinner tomorrow night?"

"Sophie, will you leave!"

"Say you'll come over."

"All right, all right! I will!"

The patrolman guarding the

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door to Vincent Unger's hospital room tipped his cap and winked.

"How's the ticket-writing champ, Sophie?"

"Got some flowers for our patient, Harry."

The patrolman leaped to the door, opened it and waved her in.

"Something to cheer you up, Mr. Unger."

The leathery skin of his face a sickly white, Unger gazed up at her out of cold, bulging eyes. He was a large man, she could see from the bulk under the blankets, but he seemed somehow like a shrunken image of something once more impressive. The ragged gray bar of his eyebrows lifted in scorn.

"More cops. And a broad at that. If the doc hadn't of shot me so full of dope I'd raise a howl. I told you, I was sleepin' one off this morning. In my room. Nobody there. So I can't prove it. They catch the kid yet?"

"Mark's been arrested."

"Should throw the book at 'im. He got Kay, too."

"How do you know, Mr. Unger?"

"Who else? Who asked for these things?"

He thrust the flowers an arm's distance away.

"You don't like tulips? Didn't Katharine?"

"Tulips! They smell like a funeral!" Viciously he hurled them to the floor.

Sophie retrieved the bouquet, straightening the stems. "Mark thinks you killed her, Mr. Unger."

"That kid! He's a weirdo! One of them hippies. You know the crowd he hangs with? They're smokin' reefers, takin' trips. It'd take me just one night to handle that kid. One clout, maybe two. That'd be it. He'd be outa there and on his way to somewhere else."

"But Katharine didn't see it that way?"

"She spoiled him rotten. I could've straightened him out."

"If you moved in?"

"Be cheaper for all of us. Except last night —"

His eyes, like mud-caked agates in a puddle of milk, studied her, then closed.

"I gotta rest. Creepy kid. Tried to carve me up."

"Last night Katharine said it was all off between you two?"

"Need to rest."

"She said you couldn't move in?"

"So what? I didn't need her. I says, how'd you like it I take a broken beer bottle to your face? Then even that Hymie crumb wouldn't have you."

"And did you? Take a broken beer bottle to her face?"

His eyes fluttered open. "She ran outa my place. She was cryin' Cryin'! Her! I tossed the bottle down. This morning there was blood. Cut myself."

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The eyelids dropped. A groan bubbled up from his chest. His breathing became a slow, labored rumble.

Sophie said goodbye to Harry and left the tulips with the nurse at the end of the hall, instructing her to give them to "whoever on this floor they'd make the happiest."

"Apple dumplings!" Cletus Moran shoved back his chair and let his homely mouth dip in a lopsided grin. "Haven't had them since—well, since that big party you and Steve gave."

"Our tenth anniversary," said Sophie. She circled the table, collecting the debris of dinner.

"That's right. Instead of letting me take the both of you out, you insisted on doing all the work. That was a feed all right! But I remember a dinner you gave the first week you were married. The roast was scorched and the cake was flat."

"Well, I learned a lot. Those years with Steve." Sophie returned from the kitchen bearing two plates.

"Pecan pie. Still like it Cletus?"

"Give me a fork before I dig into it with my bare hands!"

"I'll bring the coffee now, too."

"That's a pretty dress, Sophie."

"My special white organza. Thank you, Cletus."

"Well, I don't see much of you in regular dresses and high heels." Moran attacked the pie. "It's kind of a treat. I mean, instead of that blue uniform. After all, Sophie, a woman can hold a job down, sure. But police work, real police work, isn't for —"

"Did you get the Crime Lab report yet?"

Moran sighed and shoveled the last piece of pie into his mouth. "Negative," he grunted, still chewing.

"No one came forward? To say they saw any of the suspects entering or leaving the alley?"

"No. It was mid-morning. Busy. People coming and going. No one noticed." He looked at his watch. "Sorry to be a discourteous guest, Sophie, but I've got to be somewhere tonight."

"Me, too, Cletus. Perhaps you'd drive me."

"Where to?"

Sophie sipped her coffee. Her pink, oval little face lit up in a smile.

"Tom Beyer's. The attorney."

Moran jerked the coffee cup away from his half-opened mouth.

"Beyer's! That's where I'm going."

"I know. You see, Cletus, Mrs. Beyer wanted some advice from me about her African violets. So I invited myself over there tonight. She told me you were coming. She knows all about her husband and Katharine Kavalis. She doesn't mind if I'm there."

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"But, Sophie —"

"Were the apple dumplings really good, Cletus?"

"They were," Moran said, resignation in his voice.

Moran declined a drink, but Sophie accepted a sherry. A genial host's smile flickered on Tom Beyer's brooding, craggy face. "And you, my dear?" he asked his wife.

"Claret, Tom."

Beyer crossed the room in long smooth strides, his arms thrust deep into the pockets of his velvet smoking jacket.

"You have a beautiful home," said Sophie.

"I was an interior decorator, you know. Before I married." Bernice Beyer was tiny, shorter than Sophie, even with her blonde hair—sprinkled a stylish green—whipped up in bouffant fashion. A pepper-and-salt suit emphasized the slimness of her figure. Her face—though she was in her late forties—was utterly devoid of line or blemish, the skin so taut it might have been plastic.

Above the fireplace hung a large abstract painting, a chaos of yellows and reds and blues like a galactic collision. "A Bonin," said Mrs. Beyer. "There are several in the house. I had them long before I married. Don't you think he's the best of our local artists?"

"I think it's a very attractive example of that sort of thing," said Sophie.

"Especially when there's a fiery sunset," said Bernice, "there, across from the painting, through the picture window."

"Here's your drink, dear," said Beyer.

"I'm sorry about the intrusion, Tom," Moran began.

"It's all right, Cletus." Beyer sat on a futuristic-looking metal-mesh chair, clutching a rye on the rocks. "Bernice knows. She knew it at the time. And she knew it when it was over two months ago. She knew she had a damn fool for a husband and she forgave me."

His wife padded over to him on sandaled feet and lightly caressed the back of his neck. She turned to light a cigarette. Her fingernails were extremely long and coated the same stark white as her lips.

"I appreciate your inviting me down to your office to talk more privately," said Beyer. "But, as you can see, it's not necessary."

"Well, there's no question of an alibi, Tom. Your secretary says you weren't out of her sight the whole time."

"That's right. I'd dropped Bernice off at the shopping center and it's a ten-minute drive downtown from there, as you know. I parked at nine forty. I remember checking exactly." He smiled. "I know how efficient Sophie is."

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"Then you hadn't seen Mrs. Kavalis in two months?" Moran asked.

"I'd seen her, of course. On the street." He twisted his head to look at his wife. She stood, still as a piece of sculpture, except for the arm rising to carry the cigarette to her mouth and then descending again to her side. "And Katharine called me about a week ago."

"About what?"

"Mark. Her son. She thought he was mixed up in some narcotics trouble. Some friends of his had been arrested. He'd come home in a panic. She got him to admit some of it and they had a terrible row. She threatened to turn him in herself if he didn't reform. He said some threatening things to her."

"What did you tell her?"

"To find another lawyer. That she and I were through, definitely."

"Did you know this Unger?"

"He stopped me on the street one night. This was two, three weeks ago. He said he knew about Katharine and me. He wanted money or he said he'd tell my wife. I told him she already knew and I mentioned the possibility of filing blackmail charges against him."

"He left then?"

"After saying he'd kill me if Katharine and I ever again—well, it was the ranting of a drunk."

Bernice Beyer stabbed out her cigarette. "Sophie, you've got to help me save my African violets. Come out to the greenhouse."

"Well, I'm only an amateur."

"It's a short walk, but it *is* chilly." Bernice slipped into a fox-lined beige cashmere coat. She held out Sophie's well-worn gabardine.

"Thanks, Bernice. Were you tending the plants today?"

"Just a short while ago. Why?"

"Maybe they don't have thrips. They're so tiny, thrips are. But there's some sort of beetle on your cuff."

"What?" Bernice recoiled.

"It's all right," Sophie smiled. "I've picked it off."

"We are checking," Moran said forty-five minutes later as he drove her home. "Every florist in the area. It may be that Tom Beyer did buy those tulips and give them to Mrs. Kavalis. So what? That just means he was lying about having broken off with her. What else could he say in front of his wife? He's still got an ironclad alibi as far as the time of the killing."

"I think you'll find he did buy the flowers, that he hadn't called it off with Katharine—and that Bernice is as explosive as one of her paintings."

"Explosive? So? Isn't that kid Mark explosive enough? Stabbing Unger like he did?"

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"I had a long talk with Hymie about Katharine and Mark. He's really a gentle boy. And he loved his mother deeply."

"Which really doesn't mean he didn't—"

"No. But isn't it odd that Tom and Bernice didn't mind me being along tonight? Weren't they just a little *too* civilized about it all? As though they'd concocted a story and wanted as many people as possible to hear it."

Moran fished in his coat for a cigar. Patiently he said, "Sophie, I appreciate your trying to help. But we can't just —"

"Of course not, Cletus. But Steve taught me some things about observation. I noticed Tom Beyer back his car away from the curb yesterday morning. The r i g h t directional signal went on, even though he had no intention of turning right—he actually turned left. He must have bumped the right directional signal with his knee. Tom's a rather graceful man. Why would he bump his knee that way? Only if the front seat had been moved forward so that his long legs were pressed right up against the steering column.

"Why would the seat be moved up? So his wife, who's so much shorter, could touch the pedals when she drove. Careful, Cletus, that light's turning yellow."

"I see it, Sophie!"

"Which means he was lying. Bernice had driven him downtown. Probably she told him she wanted to use the car while he was in the office. Probably there's something wrong with their other car. I imagine you'll find it's being repaired. Bernice called him, after the killing, and blurted out what she'd done. He told her to walk away from the downtown area, that he'd get the car and say he was going to pick her up at the shopping center. They'd maintain she'd been there all the time. She'd never even be a suspect. You'll probably also find that they both have their own keys to the car. I was standing there when he got in, so he couldn't move the seat back then."

Moran's mouth worked furiously, pumping out choppy wisps of smoke. "Possible. Hell, probable! But—evidence?"

"You know that 'beetle' I took off her cuff?"

"It's a rare bug," Moran pontificated sarcastically, "that only afflicts tulips. Therefore, it got on Mrs. Beyer when she touched the flowers the Kavalis woman had in her kitchen and —"

"This 'beetle' "—Sophie held it up—"is a contact lens. Check it out and y o u ' l l find it's Katharine's. She must've j u s t started wearing them. Goodness knows, she needed something, the way she'd drive around bumping into cars. And she was too vain to wear glasses. But c o n t a c t

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lenses, the first few times you wear them, cause a lot of tears to flow. I remember when Alice Lindstrom—one of my bowling buddies—got hers. We thought she must've lost her husband to another woman, she was weeping so."

"A contact lens? Was that the only thing could make that babe cry? But how —?"

"The syrup. Some of it spilled on Bernice's cuff. I felt it there just now. Katharine lost the lens as she fell. It stuck to the cuff of Bernice's coat. Analyze the stain and you'll find the syrup—and probably a bit of Katharine's blood. Bernice must've walked in on the spur of the moment, to thresh the whole thing out, then spotted the flowers—tulips. She suspected Tom sent them—the only flower he likes. Katharine probably admitted Tom sent them and that set Bernice off. Afterwards, she threw the tulips on the body out of rage or spite. Not, certainly, in a final farewell."

Moran grunted. "I'll have some boys back there in an hour."

"Oh, there's no hurry, Cletus. Bernice is as high-strung as a toy terrier. The longer you let her dangle, the easier it'll be to get it all out of her. Tom knew that. That's why his strategy was to keep her from even being considered a possibility."

"Sophie, if you were one of the boys in my department I'd give you a bottle of bourbon and a box of cigars!"

"Nothing like that's necessary, Cletus. Only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, if you wouldn't mind too much if I stopped by at the Detective Bureau now and again. Just to see what's going on. I wouldn't disturb anybody."

"Sophie —"

"Just once in a while." She patted his hand.

Moran sighed.

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Remember Robert Edward Eckels' "The Blue Lady" in the October 1969 issue of EQMM? It introduced a pair of con men, Lang and Lovell, who specialized in forged paintings. Well, the double-L boys are back, and as we said before, we've always been suckers for good con-men stories. Con for confidence (men and games)—but also con for concealment (usually deep and devious), for conscience (usually lacking), and for consummation (usually devoutly to be wish'd) . . .

A QUESTION OF HONOR

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

THE GIRL BEHIND THE SECRETARY'S desk looked up and appraised me coolly. If she was impressed she did a good job of concealing it. "Yes?" she said.

"My name is Lang," I said. "Please tell Mr. Frelling that I'm here to see him." I smiled.

The girl drew a short line with her pencil through something typed on the sheet of paper in front of her and placed the paper in a metal tray at one side of her desk. "Do you have an appointment?" she said.

She was, I decided, very like her desk—sleek and modern and functional. Only her eyes kept her from being beautiful. They were hard and brittle around the edges.

"No," I said, "I don't, but—"

The girl turned her attention back to the papers before her. "Mr. Frelling sees no one without an appointment," she said.

I sat down in the visitor's chair beside her desk, folded my hands across my stomach, leaned back, and crossed my legs. "Oh," I said, pretending I didn't notice her frowning stare, "I imagine he'll see me. Just tell him the man who sold him the Westmacott painting six months ago is back."

The girl's eyes turned thoughtful. I could appreciate her dilemma. On the one hand there was the rule—no appointment, no admittance. On the other was the fact that Frelling was almost as passionate about collecting art as he was about collecting money. She tapped the eraser end of her pencil against the desk while she tried to make up her mind.

I winked at her. "Go ahead,"

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I said. "Live dangerously and call him."

She shrugged, swiveled around, and picked up her phone. She spoke softly and quickly into it, listened for a few moments, then swiveled back to face me. Her eyes had grown appraising again.

"Through there," she said, nodding slightly to point the way.

"There" seemed to be a solid oak wall. But the girl didn't look like the type that went in for fun and games, so I stood up and stepped out briskly. My faith was justified. As I was about to bang into the wall it slid apart silently from the middle and I went into Frelling's office.

Actually, it was more like a throne room than an office. Frelling sat in a high-backed armchair at the far end of the room, where light from the windows cast him and the man who was standing slightly to his left rear in sharp relief. Instead of a desk, a large, low coffee table stood before him. Only the intercom on one corner indicated that the table served any purpose other than decoration.

"Well," Frelling said jovially as I approached, "Mr. Lang. This is a surprise." He was a stocky man with a leonine head set low and forward on his shoulders so that he seemed almost neckless. Surprisingly for a man of his bulk, he spoke in a hoarse tenor voice.

Now he turned to the man beside him. "You remember Mr. Lang, don't you, Charles? Mr. Lang sold me a painting by Abner Westmacott some six months or so ago. A very fine painting—and a bargain too."

"Yeah," Charles said, "I remember him."

I remembered Charles too. He was Frelling's bodyguard and all-purpose goon. A giant ape of a man whose carefully tailored suit couldn't disguise the fact that he'd have been more at home in the prize ring—or swinging from a tree.

"I suppose," Frelling went on to me, "that you have another bargain for me."

"No, sir," I said, sitting down uninvited in one of the smaller and, of course, lower-backed chairs across from him. "As a matter of fact, I've come to buy back the Westmacott."

The smile disappeared from Frelling's face. "Buy it back?" he said sharply. "Why?"

"Well," I said, "this is rather embarrassing to admit. But I'm afraid we've both been victimized. I've just found that the painting I sold you is a forgery. Naturally—" I smiled earnestly—"I want to make good."

Frelling's eyes had narrowed to two unreadable slits. "I see," he said. He laced his fingers together and rested his chin on them. "How did you learn about it being a forgery?"

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"How I did," I said, smiling more earnestly than ever, "isn't important. What is important, though, is that I have here—" I patted my breast pocket— "a certified check for the amount you paid for the painting, $25,000, which I'm prepared to refund for the painting."

"Mm-mm," Frelling said. "Let me ask you again: why?"

"Why?" I said, bewildered. "Why, what else can I do?"

"You could," Frelling said, "do nothing. From what my lawyers have told me, a person can't be held liable in cases like this unless it can be proved that he wasn't acting in good faith—or had knowingly misrepresented the object."

"Well," I said, "I suppose from a strictly legal point of view I'm not liable. But I look on this as a question of honor."

"Now that," Frelling said, "is very interesting. Especially since when you sold me the Westmacott I was given the distinct impression that it had been stolen. And that was why I was getting it at half price."

I stopped smiling. "Now," I said, "I'm certain that I said nothing—"

"No," Frelling interrupted, "you didn't. But you worked very hard to give that impression without saying it." He waved a hand impatiently. "In any case, it's immaterial now. I couldn't return the Westmacott even if I wanted to. I sold it over a month ago to the Municipal Museum of Art. For, I might add, $60,000. I'm surprised you haven't heard of it; it was in all the papers."

"You sold it!" I cried. "You don't know what you've done. You—" I caught myself and bit the words off. I stood up, the smile back on my face. "Well, in that case," I said, "I won't take up any more of your time. I'll—"

"Not so fast," Frelling said. "There's something going on here that I don't understand. And you're not leaving here until I get to the bottom of it." He spoke over his shoulder. "Charles, help Mr. Lang back into his seat."

Charles covered the distance between us in three brisk strides. "Sit down," he said. He put a huge hand on my chest and shoved.

I sat down.

"Now," Frelling said, "I want the truth. And so that you won't waste time telling more lies, let's get a few things straight. You," he went on, pointing a blunt finger at me, "are nothing but a cheap con man. I spotted you for that when you first walked in here with that phony Westmacott."

"Then why—" I began.

"Why did I buy it?" Frelling finished for me. "Because it was an unusually fine copy, and I saw a chance to make a profit on

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it. With my reputation behind it no one would think of questioning authenticity." He smiled dreamily. "So all I had to do was wait a few months and then sell it for more than twice what I paid you for it."

I laughed bitterly. "I hope you're happy with your profit."

Frelling studied me thoughtfully. "Maybe you'd better explain that remark," he said at last.

I glanced up at Charles glowering down at me, then I shrugged. "The game's over," I said. "So why not? The truth of the matter is that I work partners with a character named Lovell." I smiled wryly. "Lovell's a nut about the food he eats and he's as nervous as your Aunt Nelly in a hailstorm. But he has some compensating characteristics.

"For one thing, he's an artist with a large if somewhat specialized talent. He can forge a painting by any artist living or dead and do it so well that the original artist himself would be hard put to tell the difference. Although to be on the safe side we generally stick to the dead ones." I grinned up at Frelling. He didn't grin back.

"Go on," he said.

"Well, anyway, Lovell mixes his own paints—using only the materials and methods the original artist would have used. And he has his own special ways of 'aging' the painting.

"The big problem is getting the right kind of canvas. They literally don't make canvas like they used to. What we do is buy a cheaper painting of about the same age as the one Lovell is going to forge and then he paints over it. It's easier than scraping the canvas clean. And the practice wasn't uncommon among the Old Masters themselves. They weren't ones to waste a canvas if they could help it."

"All this is very interesting," Frelling said, "but I fail to see the point."

"You will," I said. "We bought the canvas the Westmacott was painted on at an estate auction. There were two paintings by the same unknown artist for sale. And as luck would have it, one other character besides Lovell and myself was interested in them. Rather than bid each other up, we made a deal and split the two paintings between us."

I paused and shot a sour glance up at Frelling. "The other painting has been identified as an early work by Pieter De Jong. It sold for a quarter of a million last month. Now I think you can see why I wanted to get the Westmacott back."

Frelling leaned forward. "A De Jong," he said, almost reverently. Then more harshly, "And I let it get out of my hands."

"Yeah," I said, "but you didn't know what you really had." I fur-

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rowed my brow in thought. "But then," I went on slowly, half to myself, "neither does anybody else—including the museum." I turned my attention back to Frelling. "Maybe the game isn't over yet. I wouldn't stand a snowball's chance of getting the painting away from the museum. But you just might."

Frelling looked at me speculatively. "And how might I do that?"

"By simply telling the truth," I said. "Or rather that part of the truth we want the museum to know—that you've found out the Westmacott is a forgery and want to buy it back from the museum. It's a natural and if we work it right I'm sure we can pull it off."

"We?" Frelling said. "Just where do you fit in?"

"Me?" I said. "I'm the guy who can prove the painting's a forgery. You can't do it without me." I smiled. "And, of course, I'd expect you to be properly grateful when it's all over."

Frelling smiled back, a wintry twist of the lips that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Of course," he said. He settled back in his chair. "Well, Charles," he said to his bodyguard, "what do you think?"

"I don't like it," Charles said gruffly. "I wouldn't trust this guy a dime's worth. He's the kind that can go in a revolving door after you and come out first."

Frelling nodded slowly. "All in all," he said thoughtfully, "I'm inclined to agree with you, Charles, about Mr. Lang's character. But in this particular case self-interest seems to have bound us together. And," he went on, his eyes fastened on my face, "I think Mr. Lang is smart enough to realize I'm not the kind he can safely play any tricks on. So, on balance, I think we'll go along with his little scheme."

He pressed down one of the buttons on his intercom. "Miss Ryan," he said, "what's the name of the managing director at the Municipal Museum?"

The girl's voice came back, clear but slightly tinny: "Murchison, Mr. Frelling."

"Yes," Frelling said, "that's the one. Well, call him and tell him I want to see him right away in my office. Tell him it's a matter of the utmost importance."

He released the button without waiting for a reply and gave me another of his bleak smiles. "It won't be long," he said. "Now tell me, just how did you plan to handle Mr. Murchison?"

"Oh, dear," Murchison said. "Oh, dear, this is terrible." He was a slight, balding man with a sharp nose in a thin face and a jawline that merged almost imperceptibly with his throat. His eyes flicked around the room like a nervous bird's. "I don't sup-

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pose," he went on, "that there's any possibility that it isn't true."

"None whatsoever," Frelling asssured him. "The forger himself confessed to Mr. Lang here, who of course immediately got in touch with me." For obvious reasons we weren't letting Murchison in on my part in the original swindle. "I investigated thoroughly," Frelling added. "Most thoroughly. And there can be no doubt. The Westmacott is a forgery."

"Oh, dear," Murchison repeated. "I wish I knew what to do. There's going to be the most awful scandal when this gets out."

"Why should it get out, Mr. Murchison?" I said smoothly. "Surely the three of us can agree to handle the whole thing discreetly."

"You don't understand," Murchison wailed. "I've got to report this to the trustees. And I'm sure they'll demand a full investigation." He looked down mournfully at his hands clasped in his lap. "and no matter what happens I'm going to be made to look like the most awful fool for recommending the purchase in the first place."

Frelling shot a quick, anxious glance at me. The last thing he wanted was a thorough examination of the painting.

"Oh," I went on to Murchison, "I think we can avoid that. What would happen if you presented the trustees with a *fait accompli?* Suppose, for example, you were to tell them that on further investigation *you* had discovered that the Westmacott was a forgery, that *you* approached Mr. Frelling, and that he insisted on taking the picture back and refunding the purchase price."

"Yes," Murchison said slowly, "that might work . . . No." He shook his head emphatically. "It's too risky. If I went over the heads of the trustees that way they would fire me."

"Now listen—" Frelling began, his face flushed with anger. I cut him off by standing up and motioning with my head for him to follow me. I walked over to the window, and after a moment he grudgingly got up and came after me.

"What is it?" he demanded.

I glanced back at Murchison. He seemed too preoccupied with his own problems to pay any attention to us. Still, I kept my voice low and confidential. "Look," I said, "Murchison's afraid to jump because the way he sees it he's going to lose either way. So what you've got to do is make it profitable for him to jump your way."

"You mean a bribe?" Frelling shook his head. "I doubt if that would be wise. He'd be bound to suspect something then."

"If the money's enough," I said, "it won't matter what he suspects. Offer him $25,000

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That's twice what he makes in a year. And you're still getting the De Jong cheap."

Frelling thought it over for a long minute, then turned abruptly on his heel and went back to his chair. "You know, Mr. Murchison," he said as he sat down, "I feel somewhat responsible for the predicament you find yourself in. And I think it would be only fair that I compensate you for the possible damage to your reputation . . ."

In a quarter of an hour Murchison was on his way back to the museum with Frelling's refund check for $60,000 in his pocket. Charles was to follow later to pick up the painting and give Murchison his "compensation"—$25,000 in cash.

"Well," Frelling said after Murchison had gone, "that wraps everything up very neatly."

"Except for one thing," I said, smiling.

"Except—oh, yes," Frelling said, "you expect me to be properly grateful. Well, rest assured, Mr. Lang, I am. Thank you very much."

Charles was grinning from ear to ear, and for the first time that day Frelling's smile had reached his eyes. I opened my mouth to say something, but Frelling held up a hand to forestall me.

"Don't press your luck, Mr. Lang. You can't have everything. Just be thankful that nothing worse happens to you."

There was, of course, no answer to that, so I turned and left.

Their laughter followed me until the oak doors closing behind me cut it off.

I found Murchison later that evening sitting in the rear booth of a small bar halfway across town from the Municipal Museum.

"Hi," I said, sliding in opposite him. "Charles pick up the painting all right?"

"Yes," he said. He shoved a thick white envelope across the table to me. "Here—take this. It's yours."

Out of force of habit I riffled through the bills in the envelope. "Hey," I said, looking up surprised. "This is the whole $25,000. Our deal only called for me to get half."

"Take it all," Murchison said fervently. "I'm going to have enough trouble explaining this to the trustees without having to account for an extra $12,500." He rubbed his hands across his eyes and shook his head. "I don't know why I let you talk me into this anyway. When you first came to me and I checked your story out and determined that the painting really was a forgery, I should have gone right to the trustees and let them handle it. Legally."

"Sure," I said, "and then Frelling would have sat back and

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claimed that he'd acted in good faith and couldn't be held liable for the museum's bad luck. And the museum would have been stuck with a phony painting because you never could have proved otherwise. Lovell and I didn't think the museum deserved that. So we came up with a plan whereby everybody ends up with what he deserves. The museum has its money back. And—" I patted my jacket pocket where the envelope now resided—"Lovell and I have our just reward."

"And Frelling?"

I grinned at Murchison. "Oh," I said, "more than anybody Mr. Frelling gets just what he deserves. I do regret that I can't be there when he scrapes the paint off that canvas and finds absolutely nothing beneath it.

"But, then," I finished up philosophically, "you can't have everything."

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THE SUPREME COURT MURDER

by LESLIE FORD

NOW THAT THE NINE BLACK-robed justices of the Supreme Court have moved out of the Capitol to their new, gleaming temple of justice across the Plaza, the cold-blooded ingenuity of the murder of Thomas Pomeroy can never be repeated. The small

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semicircular chamber where they sat under the clock on the gallery —scene of the second step in the ruthless crimes that took place round the family of Thomas Pomeroy—has been deserted, and the sonorous "Oyez and oyez!" has rung for the last time under the felt-padded dome as the justices came gravely into the chamber.

There were exactly eleven people in the room at 12:45 that afternoon in October, apart from those who belonged: court attendants, members of the bar, and the nine justices. They were the eyewitnesses of the strangest event that ever took place in the historic old chamber.

It happened on Monday. Colonel John Primrose, 92nd Engineers U.S.A. (Retired), temporary special investigator for the Postal Department, and Sergeant Phineas T. Buck, 92nd Engineers U.S.A. (Retired), his guard, philosopher, and friend, came into the corridor in front of the old chamber shortly after half-past eleven. Although Sergeant Buck usually walked a step behind the Colonel—it was a mark of respect, in the first place, and, in the second, he could see over his head quite easily—most people looked at him first. In fact, if it had not been for Sergeant Buck's grim iron pan, his rigidly erect six-feet-four and the great shoulders that had helped make him heavyweight champion of the Army years before, most people would not have seen Colonel Primrose at all. It was only the way he cocked his head and looked up with a pair of black eyes as bright and shrewd as a wise, wicked old parrot's that suggested something more than a pleasant elderly gentleman.

Gray-haired and a little bald, one knee a little stiff, Colonel Primrose was below medium height and on the plump side, slow-moving, a little sentimental, and quite unmilitary. He sometimes wondered, in fact, if he had been military enough in allowing Sergeant Buck to take complete charge of him the way he had, as chauffeur, valet, butler, housekeeper, and manager.

As they came into the corridor, Mr. Justice Pettijohn, stooped and fragile, was coming slowly from the elevator on his way to the robing room. As he saw Colonel Primrose, his face clouded and he stopped.

"I hear you went to look into the Thompson Airways crash?" he asked.

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I hope you didn't lose anyone, sir."

"An old friend," Mr. Justice Pettijohn said sadly. He hesitated, a question in his eyes.

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "I'm sorry, sir," he said gently. "None of them was recognizable. The plane burned out in the marsh."

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Mr. Justice Pettijohn passed his thin blue-veined hand across his forehead.

"It's bitterly ironic," he said after a moment. "His crashing that way. He was going to address the meeting of the Women's Defense League here in the Capitol Building last night—on the place of women in military aviation. I'd expected him to lunch today."

He shook his head and turned away. Colonel Primrose watched him go slowly toward the robing room. Garrow, secret-service man attached to the Supreme Court, bowed and opened the door for him. Colonel Primrose turned stiffly to where Sergeant Buck's giant form was standing at attention behind him.

"He meant Julian Block," he said. "Strange, wasn't it?"

"You get it when it's coming to you, sir," Sergeant Buck said philosophically. "Whether you're in an airplane or home in bed. It's what they call fate."

Colonel Primrose smiled and glanced at his watch. Men were busily dashing in and out of the clerk's office across the corridor. He looked at them curiously. Colonel Primrose was very inquisitive, both by nature and profession, and, furthermore, it was not often that he found himself on Capitol Hill so early in the day. In fact, he could not recall the last time he had attended a session of the Supreme Court. They were usually pretty dull, from a layman's point of view, and tourists kept coming in and going out, which made it harder than ever to keep your mind on what was going on. At the present moment, however, and for a very particular reason, he was watching the bustle and hurry in the narrow corridor with a lively professional interest.

He went on toward the entrance and, without turning his gray head—it turned with difficulty, thanks to a German bullet through the neck—he took in the half circle of a room, the domed ceiling, the illuminated skylights, the three red-velvet-draped windows over the low gallery. The gallery itself, across the end of the room opposite the entrance, was supported by pillars of Potomac marble that made a background for the mahogany bar and the nine dark leather chairs in which the nine justices would sit when the hands of the white-faced clock on the gallery rail stood at 12:00.

Colonel Primrose stood an instant in the door, then turned to a bench at the right. He sat down, straightened out his stiff knee with both hands, settled back, feeling the awed silence that hung over the room, and looked about him. In the space before the bar was a long table with four chairs where opposing counsel sat. Directly in front of the Chief

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Justice's chair was a sloped reading desk, where counsel stood to argue before the Court. Toward Colonel Primrose there were chairs arranged in semicircular rows, for members of the bar, and curved benches for the public, extending round the circumference of the room.

Pages in blue suits kept coming in and out. Messengers came and went, all very quietly, through the door at the end of the semicircle to Colonel Primrose's right. That door, he knew, led across a narrow corridor to the marshal's room. Off one end of the corridor was the Attorney General's office. At the other end were a lavatory and a flight of iron steps leading up to the gallery. Colonel Primrose glanced up across the room at it. He could see a closed door at each end, left and right, of the semicircle.

Colonel Primrose, waiting for the justices to enter, was really not particularly interested in the architecture of the chamber, except for the blank niches on either side of the main entrance, once intended for statues but now fitted with leather seats just wide enough to hold two and a half people. One of them was now occupied by a dark-haired, furtive-eyed man in a brown corduroy suit. In the other niche was a girl. Colonel Primrose had noticed her as soon as he sat down. She had on a blue-colored dress and a mink scarf. She had one lovely brown eye and one delicately arched but very definite dark eyebrow, and a soft mop of gleaming red-gold curls on one side of her head. The other eye and eyebrow and the rest of the curls Colonel Primrose had to take on faith, because of her felt hat.

She was sitting calmly there, her suede bag in her lap, studying the diagram of the Court which the attendant gives each person as he comes in.

Colonel Primrose's eye traveled along the curved benches in front of him. They were sparsely occupied by people, tourists obviously, staring about.

The hands of the white-faced clock were moving toward 12:00. The hushed silence in the room deepened. People sat forward in tense expectancy, waiting for the door behind the center chair to open. Abruptly the deputy marshal's gavel pounded a single stroke. People scrambled to their feet. The deputy marshal's sonorous voice intoned, "The Chief Justice and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States."

The Chief Justice, tall, portly, clean-shaven, with stern thin lips contradicted by a pair of twinkling blue eyes, moved into the silent room, followed by the associate justices.

"Oyez and oyez and oyez!"

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cried the deputy marshal. "All persons having business before the Honorable the Supreme Court of the United States are admonished to draw near and give their attention, for the Court is now sitting. God save the United States and this honorable Court."

As they sat down, not nine ordinary men in black silk, but nine august figures, beyond passion and prejudice, on their brows the majesty and wisdom of the Law, the clerk rose and called a name. One by one five men came forward, each bringing another man with him to sponsor for practice before the Court. The five new members filed to the clerk's desk, took the oath droned out to them, and departed with their sponsors.

The spectators' benches began to empty.

"No wonder," Colonel Primrose thought. He remembered that Monday was the day the justices read their opinions.

"Report on Case Thirty-five," said the Chief Justice. His voice was clear and deep.

"No report."

"Forty-five?"

"No report."

"Case Number Two."

Colonel Primrose, agreeably surprised that there were no justices' reports, leaned forward. The girl in the blue-colored dress leaned forward too. Colonel Primrose, glancing about the room, saw two young men come in through the marshal's door, and saw them both look across the room as if they knew that the girl in blue would be there. She smiled quickly. The young men sat down by the marshal's door.

Colonel Primrose looked down at the two men in morning coats who had taken their places at the counsel table. Having taken the pains to get an excellent description of Thomas Pomeroy, he had no trouble in picking him out—the tall burly man with heavy shoulders and a pink shiny dome fringed with snowy-white hair. The other man, with the thick sandy hair that looked like a cap, and the sharp mobile face, would be Jerome Givler, partner in the law firm of Pomeroy, Knapp & Givler. He was sitting in the chair nearest the end of the table while Pomeroy spoke.

Colonel Primrose fastened his eyes on the two buttons at the tail of Thomas Pomeroy's coat and waited patiently. The few spectators who remained were beginning to leave. Colonel Primrose suddenly remembered that the ceiling was felt-lined, and that was why it was impossible to hear anyone whose back was turned toward you.

He glanced about the room. Nine men remained inside the enclosure, including the clerk, the marshal, and Garrow, the court detective. Ten people, not counting himself and Sergeant Buck and

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the girl in the blue dress, were left on the public benches. Colonel Primrose's eyes wandered back to the big bald-headed man who was talking.

He shook his head. "Narrow squeak," he thought.

He leaned over toward his granite-faced sergeant, who was following the lead of the Chief Justice and four of the associate justices in stifling a gigantic yawn.

"That's Pomeroy talking," he whispered. "Lucky devil!"

Sergeant Buck suppressed his yawn abruptly, blinked, stiffened to attention, and looked puzzled.

"He'd planned to come down in that plane," Colonel Primrose whispered. "Just missed it. His daughter, too. That's probably her." He indicated the girl in the blue dress. "I don't see Mrs. Ellis."

"I read she's at the White House for lunch, sir."

Colonel Primrose nodded. Hilda Ellis, the noted woman flyer and Thomas Pomeroy's niece, had also had a narrow squeak. The plane that Colonel Primrose had seen on Friday had crashed aflame into a marsh eight miles south of Bordentown.

Colonel Primrose looked again at the broad morning-coated back in front of him and glanced up at the clock. It was 12:40. The plaintiff—the Burton-Savage Steel Company—had been allowed one hour to speak. Two women farther along on the bench began to edge toward the end of it. The hands of the clock moved slowly. It was 12:41. The two women edged farther along and made a dash for it. Sergeant Buck heaved a vast sigh and looked ostentatiously at the gigantic silver watch he carried in his vest pocket. Colonel Primrose smiled slightly. It was 12:42.

Colonel Primrose often thought later of those last few minutes. He remembered glancing at the girl to his left and seeing that the young man with the light hair and the slow cheerful grin had joined her. He remembered looking back, then, toward the marshal's door, to his right, and seeing that the short thick-set young man was still sitting there. And he remembered glancing up a last time at the clock in the gallery railing.

It was 12:44, and the minute hand of the clock was inexorably moving, not figuratively, but literally and actually, toward sudden death.

Then it happened, suddenly and simply. There was a deafening report, a spurt of flame from the center of the gallery. A circling cloud of bluish smoke rolled gently up to the ceiling. A woman screamed.

Sergeant Buck sprang to his feet, and Colonel Primrose, rising slowly, saw Thomas Pomeroy clutch both hands to his heart,

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lurch forward onto the desk, and slide heavily off it to the floor.

Before the instant of appalled and deadly silence had come to an end Colonel Primrose was halfway to the bench.

"The gallery, Buck!" he said sharply. "The stairs through that door!"

As Sergeant Buck disappeared through the marshal's door in giant strides Colonel Primrose turned to the bench.

"Keep back, gentlemen!" he said. "Keep underneath the gallery—that shot came from there."

The silence came abruptly to an end as the clamor of excited and frightened voices broke out.

The Chief Justice rose from his chair. "Order, order!" he said curtly. "Sit down, please. Keep your places!"

Colonel Primrose's sharp black eyes went from one end of the gallery to the other. There was no movement there. He saw Mr. Justice Pettijohn lean over and speak hurriedly to the Chief Justice. Then someone pushed past him. It was the girl in the blue dress.

She knelt by the inert form on the floor. The man with the fine, sharply drawn face, Jerome Givler, rose suddenly, as if he had been released by her act from the spell cast by the incredible event, and knelt also.

"Keep your places, please!" the Chief Justice said evenly. He was still standing. "Colonel Primrose, Mr. Pettijohn has told me who you are. You will take charge, please."

The door at the right end of the gallery burst open. Sergeant Buck strode through it and stopped dead in his tracks. Colonel Primrose waited, wondering.

"There's nobody here, sir!" Buck said. He strode into the center of the gallery and bent down to the clock. Then Colonel Primrose understood.

"Don't touch it, Buck!" he said sharply. He turned quickly. Garrow, the court detective, was standing by the main entrance, staring open-mouthed.

"Lock that door," Colonel Primrose said. "Mr. Marshal, see that no one leaves this room. Call the Capitol police at once and have them close the entire building. Call Captain Brady of the Metropolitan Police. Get hold of a doctor."

He went toward the bench and stared up to the left of the clock on the gallery rail. He was looking up at the blue muzzle of a revolver, visible through the decorative iron ring in the railing, still pointing with deadly accuracy at a spot just above the counsel's table, and at the exact middle of the speaker's desk—where Thomas Pomeroy's heart had been two minutes before. Colonel Primrose looked down to the

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floor. For days the wide tragic eyes of the girl in blue haunted him.

He knelt beside the lawyer's body. The marshal took his fingers off the limp pulse and shook his head. Colonel Primrose looked around. The court detective was keeping back the young man who had been sitting with the girl. Colonel Primrose beckoned to him and motioned toward the girl. He nodded, bent down, and lifted her gently to her feet. She let him lead her out of the silent room.

Five minutes later the justices had filed out of the room, Captain May of the Capitol police had closed all doors of the National Capitol, and the marshal of the Supreme Court had stationed men at all the entrances to the chamber. Colonel Primrose looked about. Sergeant Buck was still waiting rigidly in the low gallery, the attendants and spectators were in their places. Colonel Primrose looked puzzled.

There were two changes in the order of the room, apart from the justices; and for a moment he could not think what one of them was. The girl, of course—Pomeroy's daughter—was not in her seat. Suddenly Colonel Primrose remembered. The leather-cushioned niche to the left of the main entrance was now empty. When Colonel Primrose had come in, it was occupied by the dark, foreign-looking man in the corduroy suit.

He turned to Captain May.

"When I came in here," he said, "there was a man sitting there. He left shortly before the shot was fired, or after it."

He gave Captain May a description.

"Now I want you to get all these people out of the room. Take 'em across the corridor, put 'em somewhere, take their names and addresses. And don't let anybody get up in that gallery."

When the room was empty except for the court attendants, Colonel Primrose turned to the marshal. "I wish you'd help the Capitol police to see that no one goes into the gallery. There's only the one exit from it, of course?"

The marshal nodded. "Just the staircase coming down in the hall there."

Captain Brady of the Metropolitan Police came in, followed by five men in plain clothes. He was stocky, thick-shouldered, and bald-headed, with a red face and bushy eyebrows.

"What's up, Colonel?" he said gruffly.

There was no need for Colonel Primrose to point to the body lying on the floor. He pointed up to the revolver muzzle and explained briefly what had happened. Brady whistled softly.

The police surgeon rose. "Got him straight through the heart,"

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he said. "Death was instantaneous. Pretty heavy shot."

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"The revolver is secured up in the railing," he said. "The counsel speaking has to stand here—you see the chairs on either side of him. He can't stand or move anywhere else. Somebody must have known just when he'd be standing there. The revolver is probably timed by that clock, with an electric device to fire it."

Captain Brady looked down and up. He took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and outlined the inert figure on the red and green carpet.

"Get a shot of the whole works," he said to his photographer. "Then you boys get him out of here. On the quiet—see? . . . Let's have a look, Colonel," he said.

They crossed the room and went through the double door at the right into a narrow curved passage. It led at the left to a room that Colonel Primrose knew was the office of the Attorney General. At the right end was a lavatory and a narrow flight of iron steps running to the gallery. Across the passage was the marshal's room and its outer office.

They went along the hall and mounted the iron steps. On a landing at the top, littered with stacks of dusty pamphlets, a Capitol policeman was standing guard. They passed him. Colonel Primrose, opening the door, was startled to see that the marshal had preceded them. He was looking silently down with Sergeant Buck at the railing by the clock. The gallery was quite narrow. Cheap wood chairs with straw seats were stacked against the gallery rail. There was a door at the opposite end.

The four men looked silently down for an instant at the deadly mechanism in front of them. The back of the clock was pried open half an inch. A tiny wire ran from inside it to a small coil neatly tied to the leg of a chair. A second wire ran from the coil to the trigger of a .45 automatic, wedged in between two chairs and firmly secured with ordinary staple wire. A weight dangled toward the carpet, from the trigger. The shank of the revolver extended downward, the muzzle still resting, as Colonel Primrose had seen from below, in an iron ring of the railing.

"Neat," said Captain Brady. "The hand of the clock completes the circuit and releases the weight. The weight pulls the trigger any time you want it to."

"Most ingenious," said the marshal.

"Well," Captain Brady said, "one thing's sure. The man we're looking for is a mechanic, and a good one. Buck, go down, will you, and bring McLaren up."

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He turned to the marshal. "Who can get up here? I mean, who do you allow up here?"

"The personnel of the Court only," said the marshal promptly.

"Yeah? Who's that?"

"That includes myself and the deputy marshal, the clerk and the deputy clerk, the librarian, Mr. Tupper, the secretarial force, the messengers and other court attendants, and of course the justices."

Captain Brady shook his head ironically.

"Nobody but just them," he said heavily. "Just a crowd of a hundred or so, eh?"

"Not actually, as it works out. You see, the court chamber is locked at 4:30, and opened at 9:00 in the morning. There are always several messengers in the office downstairs. Anyone coming in and going out would be under observation."

"You mean," Brady demanded, "that nobody could get up those stairs without being seen?"

"Precisely. I don't see how it would be possible."

"Well," Brady said shortly, "I'd like to hear you explain all this contraption." He pointed down at the revolver. "An expert mechanic would take an hour to fix this."

The marshal shrugged. "I can't explain it, Captain. But I know this: there are invariably three or four of the court attendants in that hall, or in my outer office, through the whole day."

"In other words, Mr. Marshal," Colonel Primrose said, "whoever came up here must have been so well known to the court attendants that they didn't think anything at all about it."

The marshal met his gaze. "That is simply unthinkable."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I suppose it is," he said slowly. "And yet . . . There's another point, too. Even an expert mechanic could not do this job in a few minutes. Is there any time of the day in which somebody could be sure he wouldn't be interrupted here, for half an hour, say?"

The marshal shook his head decidedly. "It's utterly impossible, sir. Even when the court is not sitting, there are always people down there. It's quite inconceivable"

"Well," Captain Brady said, "it's certain somebody *did* it *some* time. Is that the only way you can get up here?"

"That's the only way."

Brady pointed to the door at the left.

"That's the cedar closet, Captain," said the marshal.

Brady strode over and flung the door open. The small room was empty.

Garrow's voice came up from below. "The Chief Justice wants to see you, Colonel, as soon as you can come."

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Brady said, "I'll look around, and I'll question the people who were here."

Colonel Primrose nodded and went out. The guard sitting on a pile of pamphlets tied together with a cord got to his feet.

"I understood your orders were not to let anybody up here?" Colonel Primrose said politely.

"Yes, sir. I haven't let anybody up."

Colonel Primrose smiled and went on down the stairway.

Garrow was waiting for him in the chamber. "They're in the robing room."

The Chief Justice and the associate justices were seated at the long table at the end of the narrow room. Colonel Primrose took the chair indicated by the Chief Justice.

"Mr. Pomeroy was shot by a revolver wired to the gallery railing and timed, by a connection with the clock, to fire at 12:45, sir," he said.

Colonel Primrose smiled a little at the look of incredulity on the faces of the nine justices before him.

"It is obviously a very unusual affair," he said. "Of course, the first question is, why was Pomeroy killed in the Supreme Court chamber, in such a complicated way, when normally it would have been so much easier to do it elsewhere?"

Mr. Justice Eldon leaned forward. "We may take it that the bullet was not intended for any member of the court?"

Colonel Primrose shook his head.

"To all appearances it was intended for someone at the counsel's desk, sir. If an attack on the Court was intended, it would have been equally simple for the criminal to have put a bomb in the gallery."

"What do the police think?" Mr. Justice Field asked. His voice crackled.

"No conclusion yet, sir. It's an incredible affair, really. There seem to be no fingerprints or footprints. The mystery, of course, is how anyone could have got up there, unnoticed, and had the time, uninterrupted, to install the revolver."

He turned to the Chief Justice.

"You gentlemen were facing the courtroom, sir," he said. "Did any of you notice anything unusual?"

Mr. Justice Taggert, at the end of the table, leaned forward.

"It was my impression that Pomeroy seemed nervous," he said slowly.

Mr. Justice Eldon smiled faintly. "I was under the impression," he said, "that Pomeroy was exceptionally composed—particularly when compared to last Friday."

Mr. Justice Horton spoke. "I agree with Mr. Taggert," he said. "I thought, furthermore, that

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Givler was quite unlike himself. In fact, I recall thinking they both were upset, as if they had quarreled." He smiled at Mr. Justice Eldon. "I also recall seeing the man sitting at the right center, by the entrance, leave the room hastily, just after the shot. I also saw a very pretty girl in the audience—which is certainly a deviation from the normal."

Mr. Justice Maybin smiled. "It is," he said. "At least, it is unusual for them to remain any time. But . . ." He turned to Mr. Justice Horton. "But as I recall it, the man in the niche by the entrance surely left the Court *before* the shot."

Colonel Primrose turned to Mr. Justice Oneal, who shook his fine head. "I remember the girl," he said slowly. "I don't recall seeing anyone leave the Court, near the time of the shot."

Mr. Justice Pettijohn nodded. "I saw the girl, too," he said. "My secretary, John Herrick, was with her."

Mr. Justice Pettijohn smiled dryly. "It was my impression that Givler was decidedly nervous, and that Pomeroy was almost unusually composed."

"And the man by the entrance, sir?"

Mr. Justice Pettijohn shook his head. "I didn't notice the man."

Colonel Primrose bowed and turned to the Chief Justice.

"And you, sir?"

Mr. Chief Justice Randolph shook his head. "I saw the man leave," he said. "I have no idea whether it was before or after the shot."

Colonel Primrose looked from one end of the table to the other. He chuckled a little. The Chief Justice's fine eyes lighted.

"We have the nine justices of the Supreme Court as eyewitnesses of a murder," he said. "And the only point on which they agree is that there was a pretty girl in the room. I am afraid, Colonel Primrose, that we are poor witnesses."

Colonel Primrose's eyes twinkled. "There probably wasn't much to witness, sir," he said politely. "I doubt, as a matter of fact, if the man who went out had any connection."

Mr. Justice Horton nodded. "Doesn't the fact that the revolver was so placed and timed indicate that probably the murderer was not present at all?"

Colonel Primrose nodded. "Very likely, sir. But for that very reason it would be a smart thing for him to be there. Or . . . he may have had to be there."

"In any case," Mr. Justice Maybin said gently, "a very accurate knowledge of the Court procedure is indicated?"

Colonel Primrose nodded again. "Our field is narrowed by that and other points," he said. "We already know a good deal about

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the murderer: One: he had access to the gallery. That in itself should narrow the field greatly. Two: he had enough knowledge of mechanics and electricity to attach the revolver in the gallery. Three: for some reason, he had the time to do it in. Four: he had an intimate enough knowledge of the Supreme Court procedure to know that his victim would be standing on that spot at that time. Even with a substantial field of error, that bullet would still have been fatal. Now, Pomeroy, I should think, is an unusually tall man. That seems to me to point to the fact that Pomeroy was certainly the intended victim. For instance, the shot could hardly have been intended for Givler."

Mr. Justice Oneal spoke up. "I think you are right, Colonel Primrose. I know Jerome Givler a little. You may not have noticed that his legs are grotesquely short. The top of his head would not come to Pomeroy's shoulder."

"Could the murderer have aimed at Givler's head?" the Chief Justice asked.

"I think you can count that out, sir. The chances of missing would be too great. A counsel's body hardly moves as he stands there, but his head does. He looks from side to side, he looks down at his notes, perhaps."

Colonel Primrose lapsed into silence for a moment. He came to with a little start.

"I *beg* your pardon, sir," he said apologetically. "I just thought of something."

He got to his feet.

"We shall expect you to follow through," Mr. Chief Justice Randolph said. He rose and held out his hand . . .

Sergeant Buck was waiting in the hall.

"Miss Pomeroy's downstairs, sir. They tell me she won't go till she sees you."

Anne Pomeroy was standing in the library of the Supreme Court. The dark young man with the suave manner and the blue-shaven cheeks was with her. He came forward as Colonel Primose and Sergeant Buck entered.

"Sterrett Conrad is my name," he said. There was a slight touch of arrogance in his manner that Colonel Primrose instantly disliked. "I'm Mr. Justice Taggert's secretary, and Miss Pomeroy's an old friend of mine. Anne, this is Colonel Primrose."

Colonel Primrose took the girl's hand.

"Why didn't you go to your hotel?" he asked gently.

"I had to know about Dad," she said.

A quiet, compelling voice behind them made Colonel Primrose turn quickly. "It was an accident, Anne," the voice said.

Thomas Pomeroy's partner was standing in the door. The man had the head and torso of a six-

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footer on legs so unequal to them that he must have been a full three inches shorter than Colonel Primrose, and Colonel Primrose's figure was less than average height. Under Jerome Givler's thatch of hair and shaggy brows a pair of gray eyes as sharp as steel were fixed on the girl.

"There's no reason whatever to think otherwise," he added quietly.

Anne Pomeroy shrank unconsciously as she turned questioning, bewildered eyes to Colonel Primrose.

"That's possible," he said. "But I'm afraid what little evidence we have seems to point to a deliberate plot against your father's life."

Givler sat down.

"You'll see how absurd that is, Colonel, when I tell you that it was definitely understood by everybody concerned that *I* was to open the case this morning—not Pomeroy. I had expected to do so until eleven o'clock. If that shot was meant for anyone, it was meant for me."

Colonel Primrose was about to speak, when voices sounded outside.

"It's all right, Mr. Tupper," a man's voice said breezily. "This is Miss Pomeroy's cousin."

Colonel Primrose felt a sudden tensing of the atmosphere. Conrad moved away from Anne Pomeroy. Jerome Givler's piercing eyes lighted. Anne looked away, suddenly tired and shadowy. Colonel Primrose watched her.

A slim lovely woman in a smart tweed suit and suede hat swept lightly into the room and took the girl in her arms. "Oh, Anne dear!" she said softly. For a moment Anne Pomeroy's head drooped on Hilda Ellis' shoulder; then she turned away quickly and stared out the window.

Mrs. Ellis turned, her soft dark eyes wet with tears. Colonel Primrose, who had seen the famous woman flyer in a hundred newspaper pictures, had never realized that she was also a beautiful woman.

"This is Mrs. Ellis, Colonel Primrose," John Herrick, who accompanied her, said proudly. "Hilda Ellis, you know."

Colonel Primrose took the cool brown hand and looked curiously into the delicately live face of the celebrated aviatrix, whose plans to fly to Tokyo via the North Pole were on the front pages. He could readily understand the quickening light in Jerome Givler's eyes and Anne Pomeroy's suddenly flagging spirits. John Herrick's infatuation was distressingly obvious. It was Conrad he could not make out. He was so concerned with the business of lighting a cigarette that he had hardly nodded, and as Mrs. Ellis moved away from Anne Pomeroy he went closer to her.

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Colonel Primrose heard him say, "Steady, old girl!" and saw her quick grateful smile.

"Can't she go now?" Hilda Ellis said.

Anne said, "I'm staying, Hilda. Until I find out what's happened."

"Anne, I told you it was an accident," Givler said with a sort of sharp patience.

"But I . . . oh, don't you see? So many things have happened. I feel . . ." She stopped.

"What do you mean, Miss Pomeroy?" Colonel Primrose asked.

"She doesn't mean anything," Givler said coldly. "She's upset—was already, when she came here this morning."

He cast a glance of resentment at John Herrick.

"This has just been too much for her. I'm her guardian until she's twenty-one. I demand that she be allowed to go."

Mrs. Ellis smiled coolly.

"She's not a child," she said. "She has a right to stay. After all, this isn't very usual, Jerome. I'll take the responsibility."

Givler's eyes flickered angrily.

"*Please,* my dear!" Mrs. Ellis said softly. "Don't make it so hard for everybody."

He bowed. "I'm sorry," he said.

Colonel Primrose's black eyes shone with interest. It was a scene after his own heart. Professionally considered, it was in such scenes, alive with cross-purposes and submerged passions, that the dark backgrounds of such affairs came to light.

"When did Mr. Pomeroy come to Washington?" he asked.

"Thursday on the Limited," Mrs. Ellis said. "We were going to take the Thompson line plane down. It was the one that crashed. We just missed it."

Her clear face clouded. "That's what you meant, honey?"

Anne nodded.

John Herrick interrupted. "Listen, Anne!" he said urgently. "It was just an accident."

Conrad spoke suddenly. "Does it seem quite intelligent," he said, "to assume that somebody planted a timed gun up there just for fun, with nobody particularly in mind?"

Herrick flushed again. "You know, yourself, Sterrett, that nobody can time anything in the Supreme Court."

"Why not?" said Colonel Primrose.

"Because it just wouldn't work. This is Monday, and Monday is opinion day. The Court sits at twelve, the new lawyers are sworn in, the opinions are read. Nobody ever knows how long that'll take. Even if they did, unless a case is held over you can't *know* you're going to open, even if you're next on the docket."

"How long do those preliminaries usually take?" Colonel Primrose asked.

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"Oh, fifteen minutes to swear in the new telent. The opinions depend. Just now the reports made up in the summer have been done and there aren't any new ones."

"Which nearly everyone knows," Colonel Primrose said quietly. "And the present case *was* held over from last Friday. Furthermore, the plaintiff had been allowed one hour. Wouldn't it seem to you, therefore, that anyone familiar with the procedure of the Court would naturally figure out 12:45 as a pretty sure time to have the man who opened that case standing there at counsel's table?"

Herrick looked silently at him. Then he nodded. "You're right," he said.

"Then let's get on," said Colonel Primrose. "Who, for instance, did you understand would open the case?"

"Oh, Pomeroy, of course," Herrick said. "He always opens such cases. And he told me he was going to, last night."

Jerome Givler spoke up sharply. "You must have misunderstood," he said. "It was definitely agreed that I was to open. You remember yesterday afternoon, Hilda, when I left you upstairs, I told you that?"

"I remember it, Jerome," she said. "And you remember I told you that I had to go to the White House. And, anyway, I spent so many centuries in that room when I was a child, listening to my father talking about meat packers and antitrust laws, that I don't think I'll ever be able to bear it again."

Colonel Primrose gave her a nod. His own father had been a clergyman.

"Of course, I hadn't realized that," Givler said stiffly. He turned abruptly to Herrick. His eyes gleamed furiously.

"I presume you got your information from Mr. Pomeroy last night?"

"Yes."

"I presume further that you would prefer to skip the rest of that interview?"

Herrick flushed angrily. "It happens that it's nobody else's business."

"Yes?" Givler said. "I should think Colonel Primrose might be interested in knowing that Pomeroy regarded your behavior as insulting and withdrew our offer of a position in the firm."

"That's not true," said Herrick coolly. He hesitated a moment and glanced at Anne Pomeroy. "I told him I *wouldn't* go into your firm if he made me senior partner."

Mrs. Ellis' cool voice cut in gently. "Now, now," she said. "Please!"

The two men stared silently at each other across the table.

"What can you tell us, Mrs.

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Ellis?" Colonel Primrose asked pleasantly.

She shook her head. "I've known my uncle only a short time." She smiled suddenly. "In fact, only since I've been on the front page, to be exact."

"That's not quite fair, Hilda," Jerome Givler said quickly. "You never gave anyone a chance to know you."

"I gave Uncle Tom a beautiful chance, Jerome. I gave him the chance to lend me a thousand dollars my last year in college. He declined. It wasn't till I got my name in the papers that he remembered I was the only daughter of his only brother."

Colonel Primrose got up.

"Well, that's all now," he said. "You might stay a moment, Mr. Givler."

"I will return after I've taken Mrs. Ellis and Miss Pomeroy to their hotel," Givler said stiffly.

"Don't bother," John Herrick said cheerfully. "I've got my car outside."

Givler's face turned red. When they had gone he turned to Colonel Primrose.

"He hasn't left her alone five minutes since she came, Thursday," he said in a choked voice. "I don't see how she can endure it."

"He seems to be a rather attractive young fellow," Colonel Primrose said.

"Young enough to be her son. At least there's a large difference in their ages. She's thirty-five."

John Herrick, Colonel Primrose reflected, must be all of twenty-eight.

"Tell me about Pomeroy," he said. "Was he a wealthy man?"

"He was worth eight hundred thousand dollars," said Givler. "Free of encumbrance. It goes entirely to his daughter, under my guardianship and trusteeship until she is twenty-one. She is nineteen."

Colonel Primrose looked at him for a moment. Then he took a shot in the dark.

"Is it true, Mr. Givler, that your relations with Pomeroy have been badly strained recently?"

Givler looked at him. "I am not a man to bluff, Colonel Primrose," he said stiffly. He hesitated a moment. "But I think in this case the truth will be the safest."

Some minutes later the burly form of Sergeant Buck loomed heavily in the doorway. Colonel Primrose got up. "Thank you," he said. "I'll see you again."

He went outside with Buck.

"The captain's in the marshal's office, sir. He says they've got the guy."

"*Have* they?" Colonel Primrose said. His eyes twinkled. "Well, let's see him."

They went upstairs.

Knowing Brady, Colonel

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Primrose was fully prepared for the scene before him. Brady sat, tight-lipped and iron-jawed, at a table with Captain May of the Capitol Police. Across from them was a cadaverous man with unkempt black hair, wearing a solid gray flannel shirt and a brown corduroy suit. He was the man who had sat in the niche to Colonel Primrose's right and who had slipped out of the chamber either before or after the shot was fired. And he was terrified.

"You say your name is Heinrich Flack?"

The man nodded.

"Your occupation?"

He hesitated and shook his head. *"Nicht verstehe."*

"You're German? Deutsch?"

"Ja, I speak no English."

"Let's see your passport."

Heinrich Flack looked blank.

Colonel Primrose made the request in German. The man shrugged and made a sullen reply in that language.

"Unfortunately," Colonel Primrose translated, "he has lost his passport."

"Yeah?" said Captain Brady. "Isn't that interesting? Ask him what he does for a living, Colonel."

Colonel Primrose did so.

"Mechaniker," said Flack simply. There was no need to translate that.

"You're a mechanic, are you?" Brady said. His eyes caught Colonel Primose's in the mirror over the marshal's fireplace. Colonel Primrose shook his head a little. Brady turned to the detective standing at the door.

"Take him to headquarters," he said. "Hold him as an undesirable alien."

Colonel Primrose slipped through the door into the outer office. There was no use, he thought, in arguing now with Brady that the shooting of Thomas Pomeroy was the work not only of someone familiar with mechanics, but also of someone thoroughly familiar with the operation of the Supreme Court.

He turned into the Supreme Court chamber. His chief concern for the time being was sorting out and getting clearly in mind what he had learned during the half hour spent with Anne Pomeroy and the others. He had two sets of information, one arrived at by means of his eyes and his ears, the other learned from Jerome Givler.

The first set included.

1. Jerome Givler was passionately in love with Hilda Ellis, the airwoman.

2. John Herrick was in the same condition already, or was rapidly becoming so.

3. Mrs. Ellis was not in love with either of them.

4. Anne Pomeroy was in love with Herrick.

5. Givler had, or pretended to

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have, some idea the shot was intended for him.

6. Pomeroy and John Herrick had quarreled about something so serious as to make Herrick give up a berth that most young lawyers would have jumped at.

7. Givler was a vain, conceited, quick-tempered man.

In the second set Colonel Primrose put the information, true or false, that he had got from Givler after the others had left.

1. Pomeroy was worth $800,000.

2. It was left entirely to his daughter.

3. It was left in trust until her twenty-first birthday. She was now nineteen. Givler was both trustee and guardian.

4. Pomeroy had been in trouble in 1929 through personally diverting a fund of $90,000 placed in his care. He had recovered his losses and restored the fund, narrowly escaping jail.

5. Givler was the only person who knew.

6. Givler had expected to open their case in the Supreme Court, until eleven o'clock Monday morning, when Pomeroy had calmly told him that he would do it.

7. They had several times recently considered dissolving the partnership.

Colonel Primrose thought it over until Sergeant Buck, standing rigidly behind him, coughed significantly. Colonel Primrose looked around.

"You want action, Buck, don't you?" he said. "Well, let's see Brady again."

"He's gone back to the station, sir."

"Right. Let's go there."

At the door of the Indiana Avenue station Colonel Primrose hesitated. "Buck," he said, "go to the Ritz. Ask Mrs. Ellis if she can leave Miss Pomeroy long enough to dine with us tonight."

Sergeant's Buck's iron lips tightened.

"At home, sir?"

"I think it will be all right, Buck—just this once."

"Right, sir."

Colonel Primrose watched him go down to the car, the ramrod down his back more inflexible than he had ever seen it.

"Odd how Buck manages to make me feel like an old roue," he said to Brady when he had gone up in the rickety elevator to the office. "All in the line of duty too. Well, what do you think?"

"It's a mystery to me, Colonel. McLaren says that job—planting the gun there that way—would take a pretty good mechanic more than half an hour. It'd take an amateur mechanic, say, more like an hour. He'd need some wire, a pair of pliers, the coil, the gun, a dry cell, and a weight. They're all easy to get anywhere."

Colonel Primrose nodded.

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"We've questioned everybody in the Capitol. Nobody's seen anything. The Supreme Court was locked at 4:30 Friday. Saturday the bar was put up so people could look in, but there was a guard in the corridor all day. The marshall's staff was on duty same as ever."

"What about your foreigner?"

"We'll see. Pomeroy was counsel to the Alien Deportation Commission last year."

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "It's going to be harder than that, Brady," he said. "For instance: Givler himself tells me that up to eleven o'clock Monday it was planned that he'd open the case."

Captain Brady was silent a moment. "Who knew they'd made the change?"

"Herrick, for one. We'll have to find out who else. But, above all, Brady, we've got to get at the motive here—and the matter of opportunity."

Brady groaned. "Nobody could possibly have got up there and stayed up there all that time without being seen. It's downright impossible, Colonel!"

Colonel Primrose smiled grimly. "This noon, when I came out of that gallery, I asked the guard there if his orders weren't to let nobody up. He said they were and he hadn't. But he had, Brady. He'd let the marshal up."

Brady scowled. "So what?"

"Simply this," Colonel Primrose said gravely. "Those people are all so accustomed to seeing each other all over the court that they just don't notice each other, or even remember afterwards."

Brady pushed back his chair. "I get you," he said. "Colonel, I'd hate to find out the Chief Justice was apprenticed to an electrician when he was a boy."

Colonel Primrose chuckled.

"Did McLaren say anything about the time the gun was set up?"

"Any time after 12:45 last night," Brady said moodily. "The hour hand getting there completed the circuit. So that puts it between nine and twelve this morning. The place is locked till then."

Colonel Primrose looked at him a moment. "I suppose you're right." He reached for his hat. "Who is the president of the Women's Defense League?"

"I think it's Mrs. Pettijohn."

Colonel Primrose took the morning paper from the desk and turned to the second section.

"Society page, Colonel?" Brady asked.

"Exactly. Here we are: 'Society turned out yesterday to the annual meeting of the W. D. L.' And so on. 'Most brilliant meeting ever held under the Capitol dome,' Brady. Hm. Ever been to one of these shindigs? They lock the common herd out and turn over

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the works to the girls, and they make speeches and make an educational tour of the Capitol Building. They take in the House, Senate, Supreme Court chamber, and the view from the dome.

"Let's see. 'Among those present' . . . and so on. Here we are, Brady: 'Mr. Justice Pettijohn and Mrs. Pettijohn, president of the society. Thomas Pomeroy, of New York and Southampton, whose niece is the famous air-woman, Hilda Pomeroy Ellis. Mrs. Ellis was awarded the Society's medal for the most distinguished contribution to female aviation.'"

Captain Brady grunted. "All that get you anywhere, Colonel?"

"Probably not," Colonel Primrose said.

Some minutes later he lifted the polished brass knocker on the wide white door of Mr. Justice Pettijohn's Georgetown home. A bald-headed butler opened the door. In a moment Colonel Primrose was waiting in a room that looked, as apparently the whole house did, completely and uncompromisingly mid-Victorian. In another moment he heard the deep voice of the president of the Women's Defense League.

"How d'ye do, Colonel Primrose?"

A large woman with piled snow-white hair and a Back Bay nose held out a strong bejeweled claw.

"Sit down. Heard of you. What do you want?"

He sat down. "I want a list of the guests who attended your meeting in the Capitol yesterday."

"Want to sell 'em anything?" Mrs. Pettijohn demanded curtly.

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "No. I'm just trying to find out who was there."

"None of my business, I suppose." Mrs. Pettijohn reached for the bell-pull and yanked it vigorously. The butler appeared.

"Penn, look on my secretary. Bring the typed lists of names under the blotter."

Penn left.

"Pettijohn was speaking about you. Some nonsense about you going up to investigate the wreck Julian Block was in."

"Yes. It was carrying mail. The Post Office looks into everything of that kind. Largely a formality. General Block was interested in women in aviation, I believe?"

"In women, anyway."

"I met Mrs. Ellis today."

"Nice person," said Mrs. Pettijohn. "But they'll run her to death. Had to leave before tea yesterday to get to some place or another, and today she's giving an exhibition at the Women Pilots' meeting at Bladensburg. Crash the first thing she knows."

She took the typed sheets from the butler's silver tray.

"Here you are. Want to take 'em along?"

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Colonel Primrose looked down the 200 selected names. Mr. Justice Pettijohn was included. Jerome Givler was not. John Herrick had been present with his mother. There were only a few names that Colonel Primrose did not recognize.

He returned the list and rose. "Thank you," he said. "I won't need it further."

Colonel Primrose got painfully to his feet as Mrs. Ellis came radiantly into his library. He felt a vague sense of uneasiness. For one thing, Sergeant Buck's almost unctuous "Let me take your coat, ma'am," out in the hall, had indicated his complete surrender. In fact, for the first time in his life, Sergeant Buck noticed with disapproval that the room was reeking with smoke, Scotch whiskey, and the smell of old books. Mrs. Ellis, in a black velvet dinner gown with long sleeves, seemed to Buck a water lily in the middle of a brewery swamp.

"I trust Mr. Givler didn't mind your coming?" Colonel Primrose said.

Hilda Ellis laughed outright.

"I'm afraid I didn't mention it to him."

"And Mr. Herrick?"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Don't tell me you haven't noticed his dumb devotion?"

The smile in her dark eyes died.

"Oh, that's absurd. I never saw Mr. Herrick until last Thursday night, when he came to meet Anne at the station."

"Perhaps I shouldn't have said that," Colonel Primrose said.

"But I'm glad you did. It makes several things clear to me. That accounts for Anne's complete smashup. I'm sure it never occurred to me that the sweet child thought I wanted her beau. And that probably accounts for the odd way Mr. Givler's been acting."

Colonel Primrose hesitated.

"I wonder if it would be very rude of me to ask if you're going to marry Mr. Givler?" he said.

"It just happens that I'm not going to marry him, or anybody else. I've had one husband, and I was devoted to him. He taught me how to fly, and he crashed—as all flyers must, some time, I suppose."

They were silent a moment. Colonel Primrose was thinking about the wrecked and blackened fragments he had seen in the New Jersey marsh.

"Won't you tell me something about Mr. Givler and your uncle?" he asked.

They were seated at the table, with Sergeant Buck hovering solid and gigantic in the background. Colonel Primrose noticed that they were using his great-great-grandmother's Waterford set. It put Mrs. Ellis in a class with the wife of the Commander-in-

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chief of the United States Army, who had once lunched with them.

Mrs. Ellis looked at him through the forest of silver and flame-tipped wax. "Many people have entertained me as a flyer, and a few as a woman, but I don't think I've ever been entertained as a witness before," she said laughingly. "But seriously, I an't tell you. You know almost as much about them as I do. I've seen something of Mr. Givler. He's offered to finance flights for me. But that's a case of a rose by any other name smelling as bad—if that makes sense."

"It doesn't," said Colonel Primrose. "But—forgive me I understood Block was financing your big Tokyo flight?"

"That's a totally different matter."

Primrose smiled. "Why?"

"General Block is—was a professional backer, so to speak. He backed lots of people. He expects to be paid back, but not to be married—or anything else. It was a business proposition."

Mrs. Ellis laughed softly. "You know, a woman flyer is dreadfully handicapped, Colonel Primrose. I mean, no matter how good you are, nobody thinks you're good enough to pilot passengers or mail planes.

"Now, I make my living flying, but it's mostly exhibition stuff, which is dangerous. I can't teach flying, because women would rather be taught by a third-rate man than a first-rate woman."

Mrs. Ellis' tone was charmingly and humorously casual.

"In fact, like all professions for women, the essential thing is a wealthy husband," she sighed.

"Which brings us back," Colonel Primrose said, with a smile, "to Mr. Givler."

"How, for heaven's sake?"

"He's probably wealthy."

"I suppose so. But he's poisonous."

"He is? Well, what about your uncle?"

Mrs. Ellis shrugged lightly. "My uncle's dead."

"What about the will?"

She smiled quickly. "That hardly concerns me."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "How did your uncle and Givler get on?"

"They didn't."

"Did the business of Givler's insisting he was supposed to open their case this morning strike you as odd?"

Hilda Ellis shook her head. "No. That was rather like my uncle. When Mr. Givler said yesterday that he was opening, and hoped I'd be there, my uncle winked at me, and when Mr. Givler left he said, 'That's what *he* thinks; but we're not taking any chances tomorrow.' "

Colonel Primrose looked at her for a moment. He took another shot in the dark.

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"Why was your uncle opposed to a marriage between you and Mr. Givler?"

"Did he tell you that?"

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "It's true, though?"

She nodded. "I don't know why. He'd never say. It might be because Givler hadn't any connections. I sometimes wondered if Uncle thought he'd leave his money to Anne. But I don't know."

Colonel Primrose shook his head again, wondering a little. And then they were back in front of the fire.

"I saw Mrs. Pettijohn today," he said. "She says you skipped out on them yesterday afternoon."

Mrs. Ellis flushed.

"I—I lied to her," she said contritely. "Don't tell on me. I was flying this morning at the Bladensburg exhibition and I had to get some sleep. I sneaked away before tea and went home; and I steadfastly refused to answer phone calls or anything else. Colonel Primrose, I simply *couldn't* show up at that club and talk about woman's place in the next war."

Somewhere in the deep recesses of the old house an old-fashioned bell tinkled.

For no reason that he could have named, Colonel Primrose felt a sudden tenseness. He listened intently to Sergeant Buck's heavy tread in the hall. The door opened, and a voice spoke outside.

"No, sir," Sergeant Buck said. "She ain't here . . . Yes, she was here to dinner, but she's gone. Half an hour ago . . . No, he ain't here, either."

Colonel Primrose heard the door close. Sergeant Buck came to the library door.

"A gentleman was looking for you, ma'am," he said. "Givler was the name. Said he didn't have time to come in."

Mrs. Ellis put her handkerchief suddenly to her lips. Colonel Primrose's eyes twinkled.

"Perhaps in that case Mrs. Ellis will have another cup of coffee, Buck," he said.

Mrs. Ellis smiled. Colonel Primrose's gaze rested on her for an instant, and suddenly flashed past her to the garden window.

"Buck!" he said quietly.

Sergeant Buck put down the tray and turned without seeming to move. A hand on the window ledge shifted. Two eyes glittering white in the light from the room sank back into the night. Colonel Primrose struggled to rise; Sergeant Buck took one swift, gigantic step toward the door, covering the girl with his great body, just as the sharp report of a shot, the splintering crack of the window pane, and the crash of the Chippendale mirror over the mantel sounded together in the quiet night.

(continued on page 117)

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Edward Brady, top codebuster in Intelligence, is given a difficult assignment. He has only moments, literally, to solve a case—what might be called "instant codebreaking" . . .

THE COFFEE HOUSE CODE

by JOHN ABBOTT

THE CHIEF OF INTELLIGENCE scoffed at the luck theory.

"Seven trucks left the Federal Bureau of Engraving Building yesterday at staggered departure times. Six were decoys; one carried a massive shipment of new currency. Yet it was this truck the robbers hijacked an hour later. You don't expect me to believe it was mere chance, Mr. Brady?"

Edward Brady shrugged. "It would appear there was some foreknowledge in the hijackers' operation."

"Indeed. And only four employees knew which truck would be carrying the payload—the driver, the guard, and the two packers. Here at Intelligence they are known as the Inner Four. Since the driver and guard were killed during the robbery, we are left with two suspects—the two packers, Dave Willoughby and Robert Brent."

Brady's interest in all this was overlaid with bewilderment as to why he, the top codebuster in Intelligence, had been summoned to the case. He ventured to ask.

"Just hold on," the Chief replied. "I'm getting to the part that concerns you. There's the possibility of a coded message appearing tonight. Now, is your curiosity sufficiently whetted?"

Brady nodded.

The Chief tapped the manila envelopes on his desk. "As soon as I heard of the robbery, I called for the personnel files on Willoughby and Brent. Several pertinent facts concerning Mr. Willoughby came to light. First, he is neck-high in debt. Owes two loan companies and is delinquent to both. One wants to garnishee his wages. In addition, two department stores have called in complaining about his nonpayment of accounts."

"A financial bind," murmured Brady, "approaching strangulation."

"Second, he was recently in-

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volved in an auto accident and is being sued for negligent driving and driving with an outdated license."

"Disaster prone," Brady said.

"Third, he is being sued by his wife who is seeking separate maintenance for herself and their children—still another financial burden." The Chief paused. "Would you say, Mr. Brady, that we have here a man whose desperate need for money might compel him to sell some valuable information?"

"Not necessarily." Brady's sympathy for the underdog was joggled.

The Chief snorted. "Let me go on, then decide for yourself. From discreet inquiries among his supervisors and coworkers we have learned that Willoughby is a member of the WPS—the World Peace Seekers."

Brady was shocked. "But he can't be, sir. It's illegal for a Federal employee to join a subversive group."

"Oh, we don't claim he actually carries a card, but he was seen participating in two of their wildest demonstrations, and he spouts their manifesto at every opportunity."

Brady raised his hands. "If Willoughby is an advocate of the WPS, he must be considered a suspect. But what of the other packer—Brent?"

The Chief smiled. "Absolutely first-rate. Sober, solvent, and a bearcat for work. Popular with the other crew members. Brent has shown his distress in discovering, quite by chance, that Willoughby is enmeshed with the WPS. Now sit back, Mr. Brady, while I tell you of the enticement we have prepared for Mr. Willoughby and his confederates."

The trap was based on habit and opportunity. Other members of the night shift at the printing office made use of the building cafeteria during supper hour; but Willoughby would sprint down the block to a hippie coffee shop called The Caliph's Ear. Over a steaming cup of Turkish brew he became openly enthusiastic about the WPS propanganda being disseminated by the speaker of the moment, joining in the finger-snapping that was the WPS ritual for applause.

One night Brent had been sent by his coworkers to buy some pastry at The Caliph's Ear, to be used in a surprise celebration for a retiring supervisor. Brent was startled, on entering the coffee house, to see Willoughby in excited conversation with Al "Short Price" Grasso, a member of the WPS who had been arrested twice—but without convictions—for loan-shark operations. Brent had kept his face averted and left after having his order filled. He had decided to remain

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silent about what he had seen, but that was before the robbery. Then, according to gossip at the building, he had felt duty-bound to report the incident . . .

Agents from Intelligence worked swiftly to prepare the trap. Shortly before he left for supper, Willoughby would be told that an emergency shipment of currency would be leaving the building within two hours. He would be cautioned to return promptly from his meal to assist Brent in the packing. Willoughby would thus have only his supper hour in which to make contact with someone from the WPS and pass on the information. The nearest telephone booth was at The Caliph's Ear. Since the coffee shop was also the nocturnal headquarters for the WPS, it was assumed that Willoughby would phone from there.

Working with their usual efficiency, the Electronics Squad had tapped the telephone booth at The Caliph's Ear, then placed a tiny receiver under each table. A master control panel was set up in the kitchen, with a circuit breaker that would close all but the desired receiver. A sliding panel, through which sandwiches were passed from the kitchen to the eating area, had been replaced by a one-way mirror. From the moment he entered the coffee shop Willoughby would be under observation and every word he spoke, even if he whispered, would be recorded on tape.

It was what he might say that had brought Brady into the case. Willoughby was not naive; he knew that Brent and he were the prime suspects of an information leak. Intelligence believed Willoughby might get in touch with someone on the telephone or at a table and, fearing the possibility of bugging, give his information in code. Should this happen, it was Brady's job to break the code. Brady would be admitted through the rear door of The Caliph's Ear at 7:00 p.m., and would join the Chief and other agents from Intelligence who were waiting for Willoughby.

Feeling something like a deliveryman, Brady tapped on the rear door of the coffee shop at the appointed hour. An agent from Intelligence admitted him with the solemn gravity of an undertaker. The Chief was leaning on a meat slicer, peering intently through the one-way glass at the occupants of the tables. Beside him, on a long worktable, a tape recorder and other sophistications of the electronic era rested on a veneer of bread crumbs, onion skins, and flour.

At a gesture from the Chief, Brady joined him.

"Look at that man sitting by the door—the one in the lumberjack shirt tapping his thumb

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against the coffee cup. That is our loan shark, Mr. Grasso."

Brady noted the massive shoulders and granite features, and was grateful he was not one of Mr. Grasso's clients.

The Chief sighed. "Well, we're ready. All we need now is—hold on, here's Willoughby. Heads up, everyone."

Humming noises filled the kitchen as the machines began to glow with electric life.

Through the glass, Brady saw a small man approach Grasso's table with quick nervous steps. He slumped into the chair opposite the big man. Their voices, deliberately subdued for privacy, were easily captured in the kitchen by amplification.

WILLOUGHBY: I'm glad to find you here. I must speak to you.

GRASSO: Oh?

WILLOUGHBY: Yes. It's very urgent and—say, there's my friend, Brent. Hey, Bob, over here.

Willoughby was waving invitingly to Brent, who had stopped at the cashier's for a pack of cigarettes. At first Brent pretended not to see or hear Willoughby, then reluctantly he sauntered over to the table.

In the kitchen the Chief groaned. "What in blazes is Brent doing here? If he doesn't leave soon, he'll ruin everything."

Brady did not answer. He was watching the three men carefully, hoping to detect the furtive exchange of a piece of paper.

BRENT: Hi, Willoughby. Look, I can't stay and (looking at Grasso) what's happened to your eye, fellow?

GRASSO: (patting his eyelid) Aw, some kind of a growth that the doctor calls a wen.

WILLOUGHBY: Can hardly notice it.

BRENT: Was it caused by something you ate?

WILLOUGHBY: I think it's caused by the sebaceous gland.

GRASSO: Hey, I'm worried—should I go into mourning?

BRENT: Don't know, don't know. (walks off)

WILLOUGHBY: Wait for me, Bob. See you, Mr. Grasso.

GRASSO: Mebbe.

Watching the two packers leave the coffee shop, the Chief cursed mightily. "We've failed, Mr. Brady. All our elaborate preparations—for nothing."

"To the contrary, sir. The message was passed, and in code. When you confront the conspirator with what we know and with his voice on tape, I think he'll confess."

The Chief was gaping at him. "But I was watching their hands closely. I saw no message handed over."

"There was no written communication. The information was passed verbally—in a spoken code." Brady turned to the agent

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at his side. "Would you rerun the tape of the conversation we just heard?"

As the voices once again filled the kitchen, Brady reached for pad and pencil and jotted down fragments. When the tape had concluded, the Chief patted Brady on the shoulder and said, "I'll send two agents to arrest Willoughby."

"No, sir. Poor Willoughby has enough troubles as it is. Brent is the informer. He tipped off Grasso tonight just as he no doubt did on the earlier shipment."

Incredulous, the Chief slumped onto an orange crate. "Brent? I wish you'd explain how he did it, Mr. Brady."

"Gladly. As you pointed out, we had two suspects, with the circumstantial evidence weighing heavily against Willoughby. When he rushed in to see the loan shark, just after learning that another shipment of money was due to go out, we assumed it was to alert Mr. Grasso and the WPS. Actually, he wanted to see Grasso on quite another matter, one which shouldn't surprise us, all things considered."

"Which was?"

"Simply to make a loan."

"Of course!"

"Brent knew that he was one of two suspects and he had to be careful. I'm sure the code was his contrivance and used at his insistence. When he came in to tip off Grasso and saw Willoughby sitting with him, he probably wavered in his purpose, but decided that Willoughby was too worried about his own problems to notice the code words planted in the conversation."

"But you noticed them, Mr. Brady."

"With luck, yes." Brady smiled. "What first aroused my suspicion was Grasso referring to the soreness on his eyelid as a wen. Today people talk of a sty or a cyst. The word wen is rarely used now, and it seemed even more unlikely that it would be used by a member of the underworld.

"I theorized that he chose the word deliberately. But why? The only answer was that it was part of a series of code words. Don't forget, the time of the money shipment was the most important factor. I decided the word w-e-n was a homophone for the word w-h-e-n, and knew I was on the right track."

"Hold on," the Chief interrupted. "By homophone you mean a word that is pronounced just like another word but has an entirely different meaning?"

"Exactly." Brady tapped the sheet of paper he held. "In spoken codes the first or last word is usually the pivotal word. Grasso used the word wen at the end of his sentence, so I wrote down the last word of the exchanges

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between Grasso and Brent and had a series of homophones that made up a message."

The Chief reached for the paper and read:

wen	when?
ate	eight
mourning	morning?
know	no

Despite himself, the Chief had to smile. "Edward, you've done it again. Is there anything more you have to add?"

Brady reflected a moment. "Yes. This has been quite a workout for me; I feel the need of some refreshment. Do you know of any place in the neighborhood where I might get a decent cup of coffee?"

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a *NEW* detective story by

MICHAEL HARRISON

Michael Harrison, author of the authentic "period" sequels to Edgar Allan Poe's stories about Dupin and G——, now offers us two new characters—but this time the characters are not pastiches, they are Mr. Harrison's own creations. Meet the Tarvish brothers—detective Iain Tarvish and schoolmaster Andrew—in a tale admittedly of the Intellectual School, a tale of pure reasoning and deducing, with a few "points of interest" that surely would have appealed creatively to G. K. Chesterton, and which, we are sure, will strike John Dickson Carr and Agatha Christie as prime creative material . . .

WIT'S END

by MICHAEL HARRISON

ONE CAN BE FUNNY JUST once too often—but even had he had the warning, Jenkins would not, could not, have heeded it. He had been what they call "a born wag"—he looked like a wag, spoke like a wag, thought like a wag. Nor was he a snobbish kind of wag—simple jests were as attractive to him as the more complex, the more subtle. Even at 40 he could still be tempted to pull a chair back as someone was about to sit down. His image of himself was "The Life and Soul of the Party." If any of his innumerable victims had ever learned why he died, there isn't one of them who wouldn't have murmured, "Served him damn well right!" He was that sort of wag—a very common type. What was not so common about him was the mode of his dying. He died—literally—joking.

Henry Jenkins was the self-appointed Honorary Secretary of the South Norwood and Penge Numismatic Society. He really did know something about coins; and the man on whom he was calling

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wished that the information Jenkins was bringing could have been got without the necessity of hearing it from Jenkins' all-too-jocular lips.

Ralph Hudson had met Jenkins through a letter that the former had written to the Secretary of the Royal Numismatic Society, asking for information on an apparently uncatalogued coin. The Secretary had replied to Hudson, advising the inquirer to communicate with Mr. Henry Jenkins, who had submitted a short paper to the Society on this very coin.

Hudson had written to Jenkins and Jenkins had replied—his waggishness, oddly enough, never infected his rather pompous letter-writing style; so he gave no warning of his excruciating facetiousness to the very different Hudson. The men met, and Hudson spent an awkward hour, listening to a scholarly talk on the *hapax legomenon* coin that Jenkins had found in a junk shop in Brighton—scholarly talk broken with unseemly jests and asides which belonged (in spirit, if not in text) to the dubious wit of last century's music halls.

Still, Jenkins, the other man admitted, knew his subject; and now Jenkins was on his way to Hudson's comfortable flat in St. James's, bringing the only known example of an unsuspected Algerian gold coin, of the period when Lundy Island was occupied by troops of the Dey of Algiers—the only known example, that is, until Hudson's gold piece had turned up . . .

Jenkins, entering the well-appointed entrance hall of Holbein Court, was aware of a strong surge of jealousy. This was a bit fancy, he reflected, for a man trying to get free information. Carpeted hall, polished brass everywhere, flunkeys in livery creeping out of doorways—a bit different from South Norwood!

Jenkins hadn't taken to Hudson when the two first met in the library of the Royal Numismatic Society; now Jenkins found himself actively disliking the man who lived in a style so superior to Jenkins' own! As the elevator —carpeted of course!—opened silently to let Jenkins out on the fifth floor, Jenkin's jealousy and dislike of Hudson had grown to an active animosity. Even a rough-and-tumble Army psychologist would have had no trouble in explaining why Jenkins now behavkins now behaved as he did.

He walked along the corridor to Apartment 507—shoulders back, feet pounding the foam-backed Wilton. He had become Chief Detective Inspector Henry Jenkins, C.I.D., for this little bit of play-acting—and when he reached the door of 507 he did not ring the bell but bashed his prominent knuckles against the white-enameled panel of the door.

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His voice rang out loud and clear. There was a grin on his face. His eyes were shining with the malice of the born practical joker.

"Open up there!" he shouted. "Police!"

It was the last thing he said.

The man behind the door acted almost too quickly for thought. He flung the door open, saw a tall figure in dark clothes, a bowler on his head, and emptied the magazine of the Beretta .38 into Jenkins' back. The force of the bullets pounded the body into the still-closed door outside which Jenkins had been standing, though none of the bullets penetrated the door.

You might have expected the killer to have bolted for the fire-escape stairs which led to a flat roof. But it was a killer who could think. He *never* did what people would have expected him to do.

Hudson was a schoolmaster, with private means. He could afford either to do no work or to work where his inclination led him. He was now Assistant English Master at Bradlands, the well-known school in Sussex. He was talking, in the Masters' Common Room, with a newcomer, Ardley, the product of a very different environment.

"What brought this to mind," Hudson was saying, "was young Ferris' putting up his hand to ask what 'at one's wits' end' meant. I was just going to tell him when it occurred to me that my shining example of what a 'wit's end' could be was hardly the sort of thing to discuss in class. So I went on with what I was saying. But, this odd business having come to mind, I couldn't get it out of my head."

Ardley said, "You say you heard this man Jenkins shout, 'Open up there! Police!'—and then you heard a fusillade of shots. You didn't know it was Jenkins?"

"Well, that's funny, but I did. Jenkins had a curious way of breathing—through his nose and very loudly. I was expecting him; I heard the lift come up to my floor, heard someone get out. Then I heard heavy feet pounding along the corridor—somehow they sounded like Jenkins' feet—and through my open transom I distinctly heard that highly distinctive breathing. No, frankly, I was never in any doubt that it was Jenkins."

"Even when there was that pounding at your door, and someone shouted, 'Open up there! Police!' "

"Well, again yes. Don't forget that I'd already made the acquaintance not only of Mr. Jenkins but also—if I may so put it—of Mr. Jenkins' character as well. It seemed to me exactly the sort of silly way in which

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Jenkins might choose to announce himself. He was that sort of chap, you know.

"But, in a room just across the corridor, there was this criminal on the run. He didn't expect *Jenkins*—he expected the *police*. He heard Jenkins sing out; he opened the door, saw someone—might have been a plainclothesman—and let fly. This chap was on the *qui vive* and armed—ready to shoot—when Jenkins turned up with just the cue this other chap needed to go into action. The 'wit's end' in its perfect manifestation. Poor Jenkins! That was his last joke."

"If you knew it was Jenkins, didn't the shooting surprise you?"

"Not really. Shook me. Very nearly shattered me. But no, it really didn't surprise me. I wonder if I can make you understand what happened? Jenkins arrives—I *know* it's Jenkins; I can *hear* it's Jenkins. And Jenkins, on the dot, is standing outside my door. But, instead of doing the *expected* thing—yes, expected even from Jenkins—he calls out in that damfool way of his that he's the police. As it happened, he didn't frighten me. But he *did* frighten the man hiding in the flat across the corridor."

"You say even the shots didn't surprise you?"

"That's so. Look: Jenkins had announced himself, jokingly, as the police. He had, however fatuously, set the scene for a police atmosphere, if I may so put it. Somehow the shooting seemed *in keeping*. It's not easy to explain now how I felt about it—everything happened so quickly. But I can assure you that surprise was the last emotion I experienced. More than that: I *knew* what had happened. And why not? I realized that somebody with hair-trigger nerves had reacted—unthinkingly, instinctively, violently—with a hair-trigger gun. I remember thinking: 'God, he's quick!' And I knew I had to think even faster."

"You stayed put?"

"Not exactly. I didn't move, of course, but my not moving wasn't the important part. The important part was my *listening*."

"Listening?"

"To hear what he'd do. I couldn't look out until I was certain the killer had gone—so I had to listen hard to make sure that he wasn't out there waiting for me. And that's when I found myself thinking once more, 'God, this man is quick!'."

"Why did you think that again?"

"Because a man who didn't think so quick would have shot and bolted—perhaps up the fire escape to the roof—they're flat roofs, and he would have had a good chance of getting away. But he was a far quicker thinker than his swift reaction to the sup-

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posed appearance of the police might have led me to think. He was a quick enough thinker to be able *to pause and choose the best way out*—and that calls for very quick thinking, indeed.

"You see, he had to make sure that he wasn't leaving a witness behind. That was me—if there was a me."

"How do you mean?"

"Jenkins had called at a certain door, shouting loudly that he was the police. The only reason the killer shot the supposed policeman—poor old Jenkins—was that the killer believed the policeman to be after him. The reasoning—swift as it was—went like this: 'This copper's got the wrong door. In a few moments he'll realize his error and start getting near *me*.'

"So—again in a flash of double-quick thinking—he decides to eliminate the supposed copper before the copper comes face-to-face with him. He does this, knows that the copper must be dead—and now has to decide what to do before the sound of the shots brings up a mob of far-too-inquisitive people.

"But our killer, you must remember, isn't quite his own master. He has just shot a man outside a door behind which he has every right to assume that an innocent, God-fearing, law-abiding man is now terrorized.

"Then our killer begins to wonder why this man doesn't come out. Perhaps there's no one in the flat? But if there is someone, *why* doesn't he come out?"

"He'd risk being shot—as Jenkins was shot."

"True. But it's far more instinctive to fling open a door in such circumstances. The killer wonders why this man—if there *is* a man—didn't fling open the door. Now, why is the killer so interested in whether or not there *is* anyone in the flat?"

"Because, if the killer leaves the room he's in, chances are the man in the flat—if there's a man in the flat—will see him and remember what he looks like."

"Yes. That's what I thought, too. And, of course, it's true enough. But, as I stood on the other side of the door, and wondered what *I* was going to do, I realized that there was a much more important reason why he should want to know whether or not there was anyone in my flat.

"Suppose there was someone inside, and suppose that someone could be persuaded to open up. What better place for the killer to hide? In fact, of all the places to which the murderer might have flown after the killing, this was surely the best of all. Now, what do you suppose I was thinking all this time?

"I was wondering what to do, of course. I could just stay where I was, and let him go away. Or

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if he tried to get in I could always shoot the bolt. It seemed to me, though, that it would be better if he believed that I *was* there."

"What did you do?"

"I shot the bolt. Loudly. Then I yelled, 'Don't try to come in.'"

"Why did you do that?"

"Because, as I stood behind the door, trying to decide what to do, I remembered something. I remembered that, if he were looking out—and I had to assume he was—*he could see me*."

"Could *see* you? Through your closed door?"

"They have transom lights in Holbein Court, and the backs are painted with some dark color. They hang from an upper set of hinges, and you fix them where you wish by a sort of ratchet device. As the back of the transom is painted, the glass front set at an angle of forty-five degrees, reflects quite a lot of the corridor. It was as simple as that—my man must have been able to see me standing in my foyer, behind my door. He *knew* there was someone in my flat. No point in my keeping up the pretense any longer. I just told him, bolted my door, and wished him to blazes."

"Do you know anything about him?" Ardley asked.

"Well, probably young. Certainly agile. Look at the way he leaped onto the settee in the corridor!"

"Why did he do that?"

"I'm surprised, as you teach Science, that you don't realize what a transom at an angle of forty-five degrees would show. In my foyer I would be invisible from the corridor floor; jump up a couple of feet onto the settee, and the man would be able to see the foyer of my flat reflected in my transom window."

"That's right," said Ardley. "But it doesn't take much agility to climb up onto a settee."

"He *leaped* up. I was listening. They know the size of his shoes, of course—but it's size eleven, and how many millions of men wear size eleven! I wear size eleven myself."

"How do they know the size?" Ardley asked.

"Because of the indentations of his soles on the leather of the settee."

"They don't seem to know too much about him," Ardley mused.

"They may not know what he looks like, but they have a pretty shrewd idea of what he'll do."

"As, for instance?"

"As, for instance," said Hudson calmly, "he'll make it his job to get very close to me. Why? Because of one small doubt in his mind. He knows that he saw me in the transom window. What he doesn't know is how much I saw of *him*."

"Well, how much *did* you see?"

"Not his face, if that's what

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you mean. He had clapped a handkerchief over his face—I told you that he was a quick thinker. I told you how I warned him to clear out. He leaped down from the settee and must have got away over the roof, they think. But, just as he was leaving, he heard a slight noise, and glanced back to see my transom window rising—I was pushing it up with a hooked rod supplied for that purpose. He assumed that I had pushed it up to look through it—but I had no chair, and so I couldn't get up to look through."

"Then why were you raising the window?"

Hudson tut-tutted, half smiling. "Ardley, you really astonish me! Elementary Optics. The angle of incidence is equal to the angle of reflection. I was trying to see something more than the man's face. I couldn't see through a handkerchief. I wondered, if I lifted the window to give myself a better view of the corridor, what I *could* see."

"You were risking a bullet."

"I have been risking a bullet ever since," said Hudson, looking over Ardley's shoulder at the tall thick-set man who was talking to Brown-Johnson, the Math master. The tall man, catching Hudson's eye, got up and sauntered over.

"Well, go on—what did you see?"

"Brass buttons and white gloves," said Hudson, challenging Ardley to ask why. He did ask why. "Why did the buttons tell me anything?"

"You mean he was a soldier?"

"No, my dear fellow, he was in livery. It explained how he'd got into the building. His white gloves explained why he left no fingerprints, and his livery, how he got away so quickly. I said that he must have got away over the roof, but it would hardly have mattered had he gone down in the lift. Who would challenge a servant in livery in Holbein Court. Oh, Tarvish, how do you do? Take a pew—I don't think you know Ardley, one of our new masters? We were just talking about that mysterious shooting outside my flat. I was telling Ardley what I saw through the transom window—reflected, of course. I saw this man in livery open the door of the fire escape and go through.

"It *is* a fire-escape door, of course, but it simply leads to a back stairway, where it's just as easy to go down as to go up. So, though the police *think* he got away over the roof, they haven't any proof that this was so."

The newcomer, Tarvish, now asked, "Well, if he didn't get away over the roof, and if he elected to go downstairs instead, how *did* he go downstairs?"

It was Ardley who replied. "A man who goes downstairs is a man who goes downstairs. What

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you mean is: 'How did a murderer go downstairs?' But who knew he was a murderer? To anyone but Hudson, he would have been just an ordinary human being; a liveried porter. Why shouldn't he have gone downstairs? Who was to stop him? Who was to know him?"

"That's true," Hudson agreed.

"And there's another thing," said Ardley. "Hudson's told us that he was impressed by the man's nerve—by his remaining so cool. Well, if he was as cool as all that, he wouldn't have batted an eyelid just walking down the stairs or even going in the lift."

"Anyway," said Tarvish, with the air of one wishing to end an argument, "do you think this murderer may come back—to get to you, Hudson?"

"It could well be, I'm afraid," said Hudson. "I imagine he won't be happy until he's suppressed my evidence—permanently."

"Let's hope he's too busy elsewhere. By the way, Hudson, you've got young Selby more hours than I have. Don't you think it's time he went to the hospital and had his adenoids out?"

"Adenoids? I hadn't noticed," said Hudson.

"I'm surprised you haven't noticed that awful open-mouthed snuffling of his."

"I can't say that I have," said Hudson, trying hard to recall any peculiarities of young Selby's breathing.

Andrew Tarvish, English Master at Redlands—and so Hudson's senior—sat with his brother, Detective Inspector Iain Tarvish, in the latter's cozy little flat at the wrong end of Kensington.

Andrew Tarvish was saying, "I take it that you haven't found the man who shot that coin collector—what was his name? Ah, yes, Jenkins—who was calling on a colleague of mine, Mr. Ralph Hudson."

"Good lord, Andy! I never realized that Hudson was a colleague of yours. In which way?"

"Actually, he's my junior—my assistant master. That doesn't make for the best blood between us, I can assure you."

"Why?"

"More money than I. Less economic need to work than I. Better varsity, better bred—at least, as the English regard these matters. I'm telling you this because I want to explain that Hudson's dislike for me and my dislike for Hudson have *nothing*—absolutely nothing—to do with what I'm about to ask."

"And what are you about to ask, Andy?" Inspector Tarvish asked, refilling the two glasses.

"Exactly what you are hunting for in the man who shot Jenkins."

"I thought this was something

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to do with Hudson, your colleague?"

"First things first, Iain. Cheers, by the way." They drank solemnly, Scots-fashion. "But what—or whom—are you chasing?"

Iain Tarvish shook his head, staring moodily into his glass. "Nobody, really. There are one or two bad boys with the itchy finger, the nerve, and the knowledge that you can't be hanged for murder in England any more, to make them chance gunning someone down on the impulse. We know their names—but we haven't yet found one who fits the bill."

"The man you're hunting has been well described to me by Hudson—quite a full psychological picture," said Andy.

"I've heard it," said his brother, with a tolerant smile.

"He was telling it again last night, in the Masters' Common Room. He'd about come to the end when I joined in."

"Word-perfect by now, I suppose?"

Andy shook his head. "Not quite. Not *quite*."

"Oh?"

"I've been thinking," said Andy. "I've heard the tale from Hudson a half dozen times, perhaps more. And—well, Iain, it was only tonight that a very *odd* thing struck me: you—and the whole police of Great Britain—are searching for a man. You don't know what this man looks like. You have a few vital statistics, as they call them—"

"Very few."

"But suppose you had ten times as much—but all from the same source of information?"

"I—good God!"

"Exactly. The man you're seeking is young, active, about six foot tall, wears number eleven shoes, last seen wearing the chocolate livery with gold facings of the management of Holbein Court. Dark hair. Features unknown. In fact, Iain, you're not seeking a known face; you're trying to fit a known psychology to a pattern of behavior. But who presented you with this pattern of behavior?"

Iain Tarvish took a deep swig of his whiskey and shook his head.

"I see what you mean. But you don't like this chap Hudson? Would—"

"I don't like him. I told you so. But would my dislike influence my reasoning? I don't think so. Still . . . why not try the reasoning first?"

"Go ahead then," said Iain. "If you're thinking what I *think* you're thinking, what about the motive? A small-town coin collector coming up to talk with a fellow collector—no, Andy, it's not likely to convince the Public Prosecutor, even if we made out

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a good psychological case."

"You've been so busy hunting the killer of Mr. Henry Jenkins that you haven't bothered to ask what Mr. Jenkins was calling on my colleague Hudson about. Do you know?"

"They were going to discuss a coin."

"Ah, yes, Iain—'a coin'! There speaks the voice of ignorance. 'A coin.' But there are coins and coins, Iain. And some coins are worth a lot of money, my dear brother! As I get it, Jenkins was bringing a rare coin to show to Hudson, and Hudson was going to compare it with his.

"Jenkins had one, Hudson had one. But what you don't realize is that Jenkins had a coin which was *unique*. And then Hudson came across another; and that took away the peculiar value from the first The first was no longer unique."

"No," said Inspector Tarvish thoughtfully, "but the quality of uniqueness can attach itself to the second—or the third—or the three - thousandth - and - thirty-third—provided someone gets rid of all the others."

"True. So, if one's concerned with the *uniqueness* of a coin, Hudson had as much interest in *his* as Jenkins had in *his*—if you get my meaning?"

"Yes. I wondered about *cui bono*. But how—assuming you're right—could Hudson bank on Jenkins' saying 'Open up! It's the police!'—or whatever the words were?"

"My dear Iain! Who *said* that Jenkins ever uttered such words?"

"But—oh, I see."

"Yes. You're thinking in a disastrous *circularity,* if I may coin a word. You're arguing like this: If Jenkins didn't say 'Open up! It's the police!,' the lurking bandit wouldn't have shot him. If the lurking bandit did shoot him, then Jenkins *must* have said, 'Open up! It's the police!' But there are two things wrong with your reasoning. First, you've no proof that there *was* a lurking bandit—"

"All right, granted. And the second?"

"It's not important whether or not Jenkins actually did say 'Open up! It's the police!' What is important is that it should be accepted all round that Jenkins *could* have said those words. You have interviewed several people who knew Jenkins. I suggest that they all agreed that Jenkins—the incorrigible practical joker—could have said something like that? Yes—but this is what matters: whatever Jenkins said, or even if he'd said nothing at all, *he'd still have been shot*!"

"My dear brother," said the Inspector, "I see well what you mean—that Hudson shot Jenkins. I know what your answer will be—but, *why*?"

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"I'll drive you mad by answering you indirectly."

"Very well, then: answer me indirectly."

"Have you inquired into Hudson's private means?"

"No. But I understand he's a wealthy man."

"Because he lives in Holbein Court? Well, I suggest you make a few inquiries."

"Let's anticipate that the inquiries reveal facts damaging to Hudson. What next?"

"Have you had a word with someone at Glendining's or Sotheby's or Christie's or Parke-Bernet? Or had a word with the editor of *Coins* or of *Coin Collecting* or *The Numismatist*?"

"No. You know damn well I haven't—or you wouldn't be wearing that smug expression. What should I have had a word with these people about?"

"A gold moidore, minted in Portugal in 1610 for the Dey of Algiers, for use in Algerian-occupied Lundy Island. You look surprised, but it's a fact that this small island, only a few miles from the English coast, and situated right smack in the middle of the Bristol Channel, was actually occupied by the Dey of Algiers—at any rate up to about 1625, in the reign of Charles I. This is the coin that Mr. Hudson has—or so he says."

"What does 'so he says' mean?"

"Just that. Mr. Hudson claims he has a mint gold moidore of the Lundy Island issue, dated 1610—or, to be precise, Year of the Hegira 988 or 989. I was interested enough to make inquiries about its value. You'd be surprised what the experts think it would fetch at auction. Guess how much."

"A lot of money? A thousand? Two thousand?"

"*Fifty* thousand. Perhaps even double that."

"Good Godfrey! Fifty *thousand*! Who'd be mug enough to pay that for a *coin*?"

"Plenty. Don't forget that though the existence of such a coin has been suspected for years, no such coin had ever been recorded until the late Mr. Jenkins revealed its existence a few months ago."

"So," said Iain Tarvish slowly. "Hudson did it? How?"

"You'd have got it in one if you hadn't accepted Hudson's *very* detailed story."

"Because it was so detailed?"

"Perhaps. But no matter. Hudson's clever. He thinks quickly, he's ruthless, he's—well, he's got all it takes to achieve the perfect murder except . . . luck.

"A pity, really. For he used one superbly clever element in his plot: he made sure that your inquiries would back up his story. That was *really* clever! And so simple, after all!"

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"How so?"

"Well, he knew that you—or any other copper—would investigate. Tactfully—or otherwise—you'd get around to this odd tale of Jenkins' saying, 'Open up! It's the police!' You'd be *thinking* that you were asking whether or not Jenkins had said just this; but the person whom you were asking would think you meant, not did Jenkins actually say the words, *but could he have said the words*? And everyone who knew Jenkins would say, 'Yes—typical of Jenkins!' You forgot that Hudson had met him, too."

"Well, what did Hudson actually do?" Iain asked, a little quiet now, as he always was when his brother solved his cases for him.

"He summoned Jenkins to London by letting Jenkins believe that his rare coin wasn't the unique item he'd thought it. Put yourself in Jenkins' place. Fifty to a hundred thousand if the coin's unique—perhaps a tenth of that if people learn there are more than one of them around. Just think what Jenkins must have felt—"

"Like murder," said Inspector Tarvish.

"Ah!"

"Good Godstone in Surrey! Do you mean to say that *Jenkins* is the murderer, and not Hudson, after all?"

Andy Tarvish smiled, and reached for his glass. He took a long swallow of the good Scotch before he answered, "Not quite. But first I want you to think of the small corridor between the two flats—the only two flats on the fifth floor at Holbein Court. Lift door—one of those solid, opaque jobs—at one end. Only access to the outer world through which a stranger could have come: the fire exit. Two flats—one occupied by Hudson, the other empty."

"But how did he get a passkey to open it?"

Andy laughed. "*No one opened the flat—for no one was in it.* Don't you see? It's so simple! How Hudson's heart must have leaped when he heard that fool Jenkins rap smartly on the door, with the tailor-made sort of practical joke that Hudson must have prayed for. 'Open up! It's the police!' It's so much easier telling a good story if you can stick to the facts. Liar as he is—and a practised one, too—Hudson must have felt grateful that, in the matter of what he heard Jenkins say, he wouldn't have to invent anything.

"Very well, then. Jenkins raps on the door with his damfool police-officer stuff. And Hudson—as he rightly told us—doesn't open the door. And, again as he told us, his transom is open. All that Hudson says—his hand

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on the catch, to be able to swing the door back instantly—is probably: 'Looking for Mr. Hudson? Opposite door, please!' He probably disguised his voice—but it wouldn't have mattered if he hadn't. No one thinks in such circumstances. He must have opened his door just as Jenkins swung round to face the opposite door—and it was then that Hudson shot him—*in the back*.

"Now, listen carefully, Iain. I know you're the copper—but I don't like Hudson, and I've spent a bit of time working this thing out. It was this business of *the shot in his back* which has been the biggest red herring in the whole case. In the *back*? But what do we mean by 'in the back'? All Hudson had to do, after Jenkins had fallen, was to swing him round by the legs—thus 'proving' that Jenkins had been shot from the open door of the untenanted flat—exactly as Hudson's detailed story has testified."

Iain nodded, deep in thought. "So Jenkins was shot from Hudson's flat—by Hudson himself. And all he had to do was to swing the body round—damn, we could have seen that the pile of the carpet had been scuffed—"

"No. That could have been explained by the dying man's contortions. Of course, Hudson had to do one other thing."

"Yes?"

"He had to find the Algerian moidore that Jenkins had brought with him. But that was safe enough—you can see by the lights above the lift door where the lift is. It would have given Hudson plenty of warning. In any case, he would only have been rushing to Jenkins' help... But no one came as he was rifling his victim of the gold moidore. Indeed, there was even time to add an artistic piece of evidence—to jump up on the leather settee in the corridor to show us that the 'murderer' wore size eleven shoes."

"Yes, he would have had to take the coin from Jenkins, so as to make sure that his own wouldn't be reduced in value."

Andy laughed. "*His own*? My poor Iain, you *are* slow this evening! There is—there was—no other coin. Hudson never had an Algerian gold moidore of 1610. He wanted Jenkins'—and was prepared to commit murder to get it."

"But how on earth do we pin the murder on him?"

"Well, we never found a moidore on Jenkins, did we? It was assumed either that the presumed murderer had taken it, or that Jenkins had come without it. Hudson can't possibly have *two*—he'd have to account for the second one. Frankly, I'd let him put it up for auction, and then stop the sale on the grounds

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that there is a 'mark' on it which shows that it was the coin that belonged to Jenkins."

"Andy! We couldn't!"

"You'll have to—if you want to convict Hudson."

However, after the police had made their discreet inquiries, and had discovered that Mr. Hudson's financial affairs were indeed in grave disorder, that it was Hudson who had approached Jenkins, and that the sale of Jenkins' moidore would stave off a seemingly inevitable bankruptcy—when all this had been established, Inspector Iain Tarvish obtained the consent of his superiors to adopt his brother's plan.

The moidore was duly put up for auction by Hudson and the police stepped in—with a courteous request that the item be withdrawn.

Then an Inspector—not Andy's brother—called on Mr. Hudson. He asked a lot of questions in a disconcertingly roundabout way. But his questions all boiled down to this: "Mr. Hudson, sir, you have entered a gold coin at Glendining's next auction sale—a very valuable coin, I believe. Well, sir, the trouble's this—and we'll be very glad if you'll help us out here. The trouble is that on Mr. Jenkins' gold coin—"

"Mr. Jenkins' gold coin? Which coin was that?"

"Why, the coin he wrote up in the *Numismatic Journal*, sir."

"I see. Very well. This coin, then, what about it?"

"Well, sir, it's a bit difficult, but there's a mark on the coin you've offered to Glendining's which looks—I only say *looks*, sir—the dead spit of one that Mr. Jenkins put on his."

"I see. And the suggestion is that the coin I'm offering may, in fact, be Mr. Jenkins'—which, of course, couldn't—or shouldn't—be in my possession. Is that it, Inspector?"

"More or less, sir."

"I think we can take it that means rather 'more' than 'less.' Can you describe this mark, Inspector?"

"It's done very small, sir. I've got a droring of it here. As I said, it's very small—you can only see it with a high-powered magnifying glass, sir. But it's plain enough: H.J."

"Could it stand for Henry Jenkins? I believe his name *was* Henry."

"Yes, sir, it was," said the Inspector, deadpan in the cause of duty.

"Then I wonder what's happened to mine?" Hudson mused aloud.

"Yours, sir? Yours is at Glendining's! Yours, sir, is the one that we had to remove from the sale, because we thought it might have been the property of the late Mr. Jenkins."

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"*Might* have been? My dear sir, if it's got H.J. scratched on it, it almost certainly *is* Mr. Jenkins'!"

"But—"

"You see, Inspector, *mine* never had anything scratched on it. I can assure you that I very carefully examine any coin which ever comes into my possession. But, happily, there is a proof of that. Just to make sure that I had found a genuine—and exceptionally rare—Algerian Lundy moidore—I had some photographs taken. First, though, I asked the photographer to examine the actual coin under a magnifying glass, and—after he had taken the photographs—to sign them on the back. And date them, of course."

He went to a small safe, spun the knob of the combination-lock, and took out a manila envelope. "Here are the photographs. You will see that no such mark as you describe was on the coin I handed to Glendining's for sale. This is *most* disturbing! If there has been a mixup, if Glendining's have somehow got hold of poor Jenkins' moidore, and lost mine . . . But how *could* they? They are such a first-rate firm."

"There was no mark on the coin, of course?" Andy asked.

"Of course not! We wouldn't have dared tamper with evidence like that! We don't hang them anyway, these days," said Iain Tarvish, "and I suppose I ought to say that a clever so-and-so like that almost deserves to get away with it. All the same—"

"But how did you get over the story that there were scratches—the letters H.J—on the coin?"

"Well, fortunately, the man we sent round to see Hudson hadn't a photograph, only a supposed sketch of the marks. So it wasn't that difficult to concoct a story that there had been a mixup, and that it wasn't the Algerian moidore which had been marked, but some other coin. What made it easy for Hudson to accept the lame explanation was that he knew quite well what we were trying to do, and why we had to back off. Do you think he might have rumbled that it was you who gave us the tip?"

Andy grinned, somewhat ruefully.

"I'll say! Of course, he had the coin photographed as soon after the murder as he could. But did he rumble me? Well, yes. He came to me a day or two ago, and said, 'Oh, by the way, Tarvish, I forgot to mention that when you were out one day I needed to have something of mine photographed—it was that gold moidore, actually—and I found that we hadn't a camera. The fool of a photographer had come without one. So I took the liberty

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of borrowing yours. I did use my own film, of course, but I hope you don't mind my having borrowed your camera?' "

"What did you think of that?"

"I remembered how he'd praised the intelligence of this imaginary murderer of his. And I couldn't help thinking that he was even cleverer than that. Did you see what the coin fetched, by the way?"

"I did, Andy. Don't rub it in!. . .Of course, as we have no evidence against him he is legally as innocent as a newborn babe. By the way, did it ever occur to you that he might *be* innocent?"

"No, never," said Andy coolly. "*You* may have no evidence—but *I* have. He tells his story in a different way now. There used to be a quite dramatic bit about how he heard, through the open transom, the noise of Jenkins' loud and highly individual breathing. He's dropped that bit now—after I asked him, in the Masters' Common Room one night, what he was going to do about the adenoids which were causing young Selby's snuffles. He mumbled something, I remember, about not having noticed."

"You mean that he couldn't hear Selby's snuffles, and so couldn't have heard Jenkins' breathing, as he said?"

"Not quite. Actually, Selby doesn't snuffle. But a man with hearing as good as Hudson claimed for himself would have been *sure* of that.

"No, he's guilty all right. Too bad he was so much cleverer than all of us. Iain!"

'Q'

(Continued from page 58)

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Procter, Maurice	THE GRAVEYARD ROLLS	Popular Library	.60	5/5
Procter, Maurice	THREE AT THE ANGEL	Popular Library	.60	5/5
Procter, Maurice	TWO MEN IN TWENTY	Popular Library	.60	5/5
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Stout, Rex	SOME BURIED CAESAR	Pyramid	.75	5/15

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In which the well-known cartoonist, by means of a word-picture, takes an ironical, even a cynical, look at the climate of our times . . .

Deliberately—that is to say, with callous aforethought—we are going back to that earlier ironical, cynical American author, Ambrose Bierce, to find a title for Syd Hoff's short short-short. Shall we use "The Fiend's Delight"? "The Dance of Death" or "The Dance of Life"? "In the Midst of Life"—or a variant, "In the Midst of Death"? Perhaps, simply, "Fantastic Fable"? No, let's call Syd Hoff's story by the Biercean title, "Can Such Things Be?" . . .

CAN SUCH THINGS BE?

by SYD HOFF

MR. PLOTKIN WAS BEHIND the counter, waiting, when the young man with the gun entered.

"Thank God, I thought you'd never get here," said Mr. Plotkin.

The young man's eyes, which had been narrow slits, now opened wide. "You were expecting me?"

"Certainly. Thirty-nine times my store has been robbed since the beginning of the year. Then all of a sudden, as of last week, nothing."

"Whaddya mean, nothing?"

"Nobody came in and emptied out my cash register. I was able to keep the few dollars I took in, all for myself, pay off a few bills, even have a little something left over to put in the bank for a rainy day."

The young man looked around the store disdainfully. "It's a pretty crummy place you got here, mister. No wonder they stopped robbing you. I don't know why I came in here myself."

"You'd be surprised, it used to be a very good business until the whole neighborhood started going downhill and all my customers moved away," said Mr. Plotkin. "You know, out to the suburbs." He laughed. "Of course, soon the suburbs will go downhill too. People are people no matter where they go."

"Stop chewing my ear," said the young man, leaning across the

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counter and pointing his gun straight at Mr. Plotkin's chest. "Or is your foot pressing on a little button this very second perhaps, and you're stalling until the police arrive?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Plotkin indignantly. "I have never for one minute placed more importance on my money than on my life. You may ask any of the others—anytime they came in here I was more than cooperative. In fact, I doubt if they ever got a more hospitable reception anywhere else."

"How's that?"

"Soup. Chicken soup. My wife brings me my supper every evening. I have a small stove in back for coffee. Many's the time I've shared my humble meal with a crook."

"You know what, you're cuckoo, mister. Did anybody ever tell you that?"

"I don't care what they call me. It's how I am. The way I look at it, war, poverty drugs—they're all a normal part of our society. And crime too. Let's not forget crime. Ever since the dawn of history man has been trying to inflict harm on his neighbor—robbing, cheating, murdering. That's why I was so worried last week. I thought something even worse was happening."

"Keep talking, mister. Right after I leave here with your dough I'm gonna call the nuthouse to come and get you."

"Do me a favor, sonny, take my money and don't call anybody. Now that you're here, I never felt better in my life. After all, maybe I'm being sentimental but suddenly things don't seem so bad. We still got Social Security, Mount Rushmore, Christmas, the Mets—"

The young man with the gun suddenly stepped behind the counter, scooped out the contents of the cash register, and hurried to the door.

"Button up, it's getting chilly out," said Mr. Plotkin.

After his visitor had disappeared down the street, Mr. Plotkin picked up the phone and dialed a number.

"You can stop worrying now, Ida," he said. "Business is back to normal."

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a *NEW* counter-intelligence story by

JAMES REACH

It started in occupied Berlin in the spring of 1945, and it reached its climax nearly a quarter of a century later, in New York City and in a top-secret, red-brick building in Maryland. And the security of the United States hung in the balance . . .

A TIME TO REMEMBER

by JAMES REACH

I HAD ARRIVED EARLY AT MY OFfice in the Grand Central area and started to work on a difficult brief for a new and desirable client of my one-man law firm; but I hadn't been at it long when the inter-office buzzer sounded. I frowned in annoyance as I picked up the phone; I had told Miss Cooney, secretary to myself and the other attorney with whom I share the office suite, that I didn't want to be interrupted by anything short of a major emergency.

"Sorry to disturb you," said Miss Cooney, "but there's a Mr. Banning here and he insists on seeing you."

"Banning?" The name didn't mean a thing to me. "Do I know him?"

"No, you don't, Mr. Foster, but he says it's extremely urgent and—" Miss Cooney's voice faded in volume but rose in indignation quotient as she apparently held the phone away from herself and called out, "Sir, you can't do that! *Sir*—"

But "sir" could and did do that. The door to my office was thrown open, disclosing a tall, crew-cut, conservatively dressed man in his early thirties. Miss Cooney hovered worriedly in the background, but I told her to return to her desk. I would deal briskly with the intruder and get rid of him.

"Sorry I had to barge in," he said, approaching my desk. "You're Mr. Foster—Leonard Timmins Foster?"

"I am," I said tartly, "and I'm very busy this morning. I suggest you ask my secretary to make

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an appointment for some day next week—"

He had extracted a leather folder from an inside pocket, and now he flicked it open and thrust it at me. It bore an official-looking seal and enclosed a document affirming that the bearer was one John Joseph Banning, in the employ of one of those colossal supergovernmental agencies concerned with intelligence, counterespionage, and the like. The identifying photo was an unmistakable likeness of the man who confronted me across my desk.

Feeling what I supposed was a natural trepidation about the import of his visit, I asked, "What can I do for you, Mr. Banning?"

"I'd like you to come with me, sir."

"Come with you?" Apparently my foreboding was well-founded. "Where?"

Banning shook his head. "I'm not at liberty to disclose that now."

"But—" Resentment flared in me. "See here, Banning. This brief I'm working on is vitally important, means a great deal to me. Can't this—whatever it is—be put off till some other time?"

"No, sir; afraid it must be now. You can of course refuse my—ah—request. In which case we'd have to take certain measures. In your best interests, Mr. Foster, I wouldn't advise that."

I wasn't convinced that he really had my best interests at heart, but I was not disposed to put the question to a test. I sighed in resignation and asked, "How long will I be gone?"

"Possibly until tonight; tomorrow afternoon, at the latest."

As I reached for the phone Banning's strong hand clamped down on mine, holding the receiver in its cradle. "No phone calls, please," he said.

"But damn it," I protested, "I've got to let my wife know that I may not be home for dinner—"

"That," he said, "has already been taken care of."

Downstairs, Banning led me to a black, chauffeur-driven limousine waiting in a no-parking zone. We were whisked to Central Park, and there, in the Sheep Meadow, a helicopter was warmed up and ready to take off. In minutes we were deposited at LaGuardia Airport, where we boarded a twin-engined jet. The plane was unmarked, but the pilot, I noted, wore the uniform and insignia of an Air Force major.

We were airborne, by my watch, for one hour and seven minutes, and in all that time neither Banning nor I uttered a single word. I was conjecturing, with increasing worry, on the significance of this enforced trip;

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while for his part, Banning perused, with complete absorption, the pages of a current newsweekly.

It was not until we had circled a huge complex of single-story red-brick buildings superimposed on rolling green farmland and had come to earth on an adjacent landing strip that I ventured my first question.

"Where are we now?" I asked.

Banning considered before deciding, apparently, it was safe to answer. "Maryland."

So at least I knew which state I was in.

A jeep driven by an Air Force sergeant delivered us to the largest of the red-brick buildings, which sprawled over at least an acre of the Maryland countryside. Banning ushered me through a seemingly endless maze of corridors before we stopped at an unmarked door.

"Will you wait in here, please?" he asked.

"Wait for what?" I demanded. "See here, it's high time you let me in on the meaning of this ridiculous rigamarole."

"You'll know very soon now, Mr. Foster." With a firm hand on my elbow Banning propelled me into the room, then closed the door behind him.

I was alone in what appeared to be a small conference chamber; it was furnished with a long polished mahogany table and side chairs upholstered in black leather. The room was windowless; in the baseboards and near the ceiling were heating and air-conditioning vents, and Currier and Ives prints adorned the walls. I could not guess where the eavesdropping device had been installed, but I was certain that one was somewhere in the room. I tried the door through which I had entered—the only one in the room—and found that it was now locked.

My watch ticked the minutes away with agonizing slowness. Half an hour went by before the door was finally opened and a man walked in.

He was stocky, powerful-looking, graying, possibly five years older than my 47 and two or three inches shorter than my five foot eleven. And he looked vaguely familiar to me.

He stopped just inside the doorway and scrutinized me carefully before he spoke. "You are—? I know you—?" I detected a Slavic accent in his speech, more an intonation, really. "I think—yes. You are—wait, wait, I will remember . . . Yes! You are dear, kind friend Lenny!"

He bounded across the room and enveloped me in a bone-crunching embrace. Then he held me at arm's length, smiling fondly and searching my eyes for the recognition that was not there. "You do not remember yet, but

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I do not tell you. Soon—soon it will come to you."

He touched a hand to his right ear, fingering a jagged scar where a sizable chunk of earlobe was missing.

"Mikail!" I exclaimed.

"Aha!"

"Mikali—Mike—Zigarin!"

"Correct, correct, my friend!" he roared exuberantly. "A miracle, Lenny, is it not, that we shall meet again like this so many years after?"

"Yes," I agreed, "a *miracle*."

Again we embraced, and the memories came flooding back to me. . .

Berlin, spring of 1945.

I was a young lieutenant in the communications section of Airborne Army headquarters. Our unit, together with elements of an armored division and several service batallions, had been selected as the first American occupying troops in Berlin. The Russians, of course, had preceded us into the city.

It was an awesome and depressing experience. No one who was not there in those first few postwar weeks can possibly visualize the fearful bleakness of the dusty rubble, the almost total devastation of what had once been a great world capital. The stench of death, of rotting carcasses, lay heavy upon the atmosphere. And men were still dying violently: the city had not yet been completely pacified; occasional snipers' bullets would pick off soldiers in the streets, and the victims would invariably be Russians, never Americans. The enemies from the East were the feared and hated ones; and the Berliners, in their first tentative contacts with us, confided their hope that we would throw the Russians out and take over the occupation by ourselves.

They were a scraggly lot, those Berliners. Gaunt and hungry-looking, they had been on near-starvation rations during the last months of the war. Now they brought out their hoarded treasures—diamonds, jewelry, musical instruments, small pieces of furniture—to barter with us for a few packs of American cigarettes, a pound of butter or a can of coffee from our mess-hall kitchens.

The Russians were on a different kind of buying spree. They were battle-hardened veterans, tough and cocky and often high on vodka, but friendly enough toward us in those early days. They had just been paid off, many of them for the first time in months or even years, and they swarmed the streets with fistfuls of occupation marks, buying up anything and everything the GIs had to offer. They were especially avid for wrist watches and would readily pay four, five, or six hundred dollars for a thirty-dollar

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stateside timepiece. A not uncommon sight was a Russian soldier with the sleeves of his uniform jacket rolled up, proudly displaying both arms covered with strap watches from wrist to forearm.

The center of this three-way black market activity was the broad, once beautiful, once tree-shaded avenue known as Unter den Linden, near its terminus at the Brandenburg Gate. Hotels, important government buildings, private mansions, had formerly lined both sides of the handsome thoroughfare; now many of them had been leveled, most of the rest of them had been gutted, and not one of them had been left completely intact.

One sun-drenched afternoon I was walking along Unter den Linden toward the Gate, where a headquarters jeep was to pick me up, when I was stopped by a Russian officer going in the other direction. He seemed young for the colonel's stars he wore. His hand was outstretched and he was smiling jovially.

"Comrade Lieutenant," he said, shaking my hand energetically, "me Russky, you Amerikaner, but we friends, correct?"

"That's right," I said warmly. "I hope we can be friends."

"Good, good!" He nodded, beaming. Then suddenly he grasped my elbow, examined my gleaming chrome, government-issue wrist watch, and clucked admiringly. "Bew-tee-ful! I buy, no?"

"Afraid not—"

"We friends. Any price you want, I pay."

"But you don't understand. It's not my property, so I couldn't—"

I broke off. I knew, suddenly, that something was about to happen. I didn't know (and still don't) what had alerted me to the danger—perhaps the momentary glint of sun on steel—but I couldn't take the time to reason it out. I threw myself at the surprised colonel and we tumbled to the sidewalk together just as a shot rang out from the street-floor window of the hollow shell of a building near which we had been standing.

From the closeness of the pinging sound of the bullet I guessed we'd have a near miss, but I didn't realize just how near until I saw the colonel put a hand to his ear, then stare wonderingly at his blood-smeared fingers.

That was my introduction to Mikail Zigorin.

After the sniper had been dragged out of the ruined building by the Russians and hustled away to be stood up against a wall and shot (if he was lucky), and after a medic had patched up the colonel's ear, he was touchingly, volubly grateful. He extracted from a pocket a huge wad of occupation marks that must have been the equivalent of five

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thousand American dollars, and thrust it at me; it was all I could do to keep him from stuffing it into a pocket of my Eisenhower jacket. He vowed undying friendship and total obligation to me: if at any time, now or in the future, I should ask anything of him, he would topple mountains, divert rivers, to get it for me.

During the next weeks Zigorin sought me out constantly, and we got to know each other well. He was a buoyant, good-humored man with a booming laugh and an irrepressible eagerness to please. He showed me off proudly to his colleagues as the great Amerikaner hero who had saved his life. He plied me with vodka, with caviar and other delicacies from his mess kitchen. He took me to the beerhalls and rathskellers that the Berliners were just beginning to reopen with the permission of the occupation authorities, and insisted on picking up every tab.

About a month after the sniper incident Zigorin appeared one evening at my billet in the Zehlendorf section of Berlin, where American headquarters were located. There was a doleful expression on his face, and his voice was thick with emotion, as he announced that he had come to say goodbye; he had been recalled to Moscow and would have to leave early the next day.

It was not without a pang of regret that I heard the news: I had grown fond of the man and I realized now that his departure would leave a void in my life. I am not the demonstrative kind, and instead of speaking I could only grasp his hand to convey how I felt about his going.

We exchanged home addresses (his in a Moscow suburb, mine in lower Westchester), and promised to keep in touch. "Lenny," he said, "my dear, good friend, some day—somewhere—we shall meet again. This, my friend, I know."

"I hope so, Mike," I said, reflecting privately on the unlikeliness of it. "Perhaps we will."

He threw his arms around me in a parting embrace; then he was gone.

We did keep in touch, with increasing infrequency, for the next—oh, five or six years. Much of our correspondence touched on the startling and rapid changes taking place in Berlin. I wrote him of my progress (or rather, lack of it) as a struggling young lawyer. For his part, he never mentioned anything about his work, although I gathered that he continued to pursue his career as an army officer.

Inevitably, communications between us petered out. In later years I'd read occasionally, in news reports from the Kremlin,

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about a Marshal Zigorin, who had attained a position of some importance in the Soviet power hierachy, and I'd wonder if he could possibly be my old friend Mike; but then I'd shrug the question off as no real concern of mine but a reminder, merely, of something that had happened long ago and far away . . .

Now, in the top-secret conference room, we exchanged greetings and reminiscences of the old Berlin days. Then Mikail asked, "You do well as a lawyer, my friend?"

"Pretty well—now," I replied. "And you, Mike—how've you been doing?"

He shrugged, and his face clouded over momentarily. Then, instead of answering my question, he reached into a pocket, got out a wallet, and extracted from it a dog-earned snapshot. "Look, Lenny," he said. "Something you will perhaps remember. Long ago you sent it to me."

I took it from him. It showed a family group photographed by a neighbor, consisting of my blonde wife, myself, and our twin sons. They had been infants in the snapshot; now they were seniors at Princeton, complete with beards and Beatle-type haircuts.

I smiled over it and started to say, "I don't believe I kept a copy of this—"

"Then it is yours," Mikail interrupted. "Keep it, keep it."

"But—you've been carrying it around in your wallet all these years?"

"Correct. To remind me always of my dear friend Lenny and my debt to him that never I shall be able to repay."

"Well—" I turned aside to conceal my embarrassment at his effusiveness. "If you're sure you want me to have it—" Carefully I placed the snap in my own wallet.

Something was puzzling me, and I mentioned it now. "Mike, how was this meeting arranged?"

He shrugged. "I do not know how—I am only glad that it was."

"When you entered this room, you didn't know you were going to find me in here?"

"Not that I would find *you*. Mr. Banning says that there is someone he desires I shall meet and talk with."

"Strange," I mused. "I wonder why the elaborate staging of this scene, why all the secrecy—"

"I know, Lenny," Mikail said with a rueful smile. "I know why the secrecy. It has been—how shall I say?—a testing."

"Testing of what?"

Before he could answer that question the door was opened and Banning walked in.

"Will you come with me, Mr. Foster?" he said. "Mr. Zigorin, please remain in this room."

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I followed Banning through more stretches of corridor until we came to another unmarked door; he opened it and stepped aside for me to enter. We were in a small anteroom presided over by a second lieutenant in army uniform, a holstered sidearm attached to his web belt. Banning nodded to him; the lieutenant pressed one of a panel of buttons on his desk and a buzzer sounded, releasing the lock on the door to an inner office.

The rugged, seamed face of the man sitting behind the uncluttered desk would have been easy to recognize by any reasonably observant member of my generation. Although he was in mufti he wore his invisible four stars in the set of his shoulders, the pugnacious thrust of his chin, the aura of authority, ingrained by years of top command. General Ben "Hatchet" Hyatt had led a tank corps in World War II, had been a member of the Combined Chiefs of Staff later, then had abruptly disappeared from public view about five years ago. Since then his name had rarely been mentioned in the news columns, and now I understood why.

The general waved me into a chair beside his desk, and Banning turned and left the office, closing the door behind him.

"Now, Mr. Foster," Hyatt began, "the reason you have been brought here—and I apologize for having to do it the way we did—was for the purpose of identifying the man you have been with, the man who calls himself Mikail Zigorin—"

"*Identifying* him?" I said incredulously. "Then why couldn't I have been told, briefed about it beforehand?"

"If you had been expecting to meet Zigorin, and a man walked into the room and told you he was Zigorin, you might have accepted him without question. No, Mr. Foster, I wanted that meeting to be a surprise—for both of you."

"It was for me, all right."

"Well? Can you identify him?"

"Why—yes, I *think* so."

"You're not sure?"

I thought about that for a moment. "It's been so long," I said, "but—yes, I'm reasonably sure . . . You were able to hear us in that room?"

Hyatt nodded, not bothering to deny it. "He recognized you first, or said he did, and only then you seemed to recognize him—"

"Because of that missing piece of earlobe. Could that have been faked?"

"Easily."

"But he remembered so much of what happened in Berlin—and later our correspondence—why he even had that snapshot of my family I sent him twenty years ago."

"None of that is conclusive, Mr. Foster—persuasive, perhaps,

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but certainly not conclusive."

I stared at him. "Do you mean to say, General—" he smiled briefly, acknowledging my recognition of him—"that you suspect the man of being an impostor?"

"We have to consider the possibility very seriously."

"Why?"

Hyatt sighed. "I'd hoped we might avoid having to go into that, but—very well. However, let me remind you that you are still a reserve officer in the Army of the United States. As such, you are ordered not to reveal, under any circumstances, any of what you are about to hear. Understood?"

"Understood."

"First, what we know as facts: for the past ten years or so Marshal Zigorin had been the director of the Soviets' external intelligence operations. About three months ago he suddenly dropped out of sight. There were several conflicting rumors, although the Russians tried to keep the whole thing hushed up: he had suffered a nervous breakdown, he had been liquidated, he had defected—nothing our intelligence people could pin down. Last week the man you just met contacted us. He claimed to be Zigorin, said he wanted to come over to our side.

"Naturally we listened to his story, and what he told us was damnably disturbing. If he's really Zigorin and his information is reliable, then we've been completely off base about some of our important defense postures and would now be required to make rapid and radical adjustments at the cost to us of hundreds of millions, perhaps billions . . . Do you begin to see, Mr. Foster, why your identification of the man is so crucial?"

I considered the question thoughtfully. "But aren't there others besides myself, General, who could positively identify him?"

"No one we know of. None of our people ever had more than brief glimpses of him. He never granted interviews, never in the last ten years appeared officially in public. We do have pictures of him in our files. They match up pretty well with this fellow we have here, down to that damaged earlobe. But that's not good enough."

"And how," I asked, "did you find out about me and my connection with Mikail Zigorin?"

"He told us, made quite a point of it. You were, so to speak, one of his credentials."

"Then isn't the fact that he was willing to meet me, and as he put it, be tested by me—that he had enough information about what happened in Berlin to risk such a test—isn't that presumptive proof of his identity?"

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Hyatt shook his head. "Assuming the man is an impostor, it would have been no trick at all to get that information from the real Zigorin."

"Assuming he's an impostor, what happened to the real Zigorin?"

"We'll never know for sure; but triggered by the occupation of Czechoslovakia or some other policy decision he opposed, he may have tried to defect and been caught at it. That would have given the Russians a ready-made opportunity to hand us a ringer and foul up the works for us.

"So I'm afraid, Mr. Foster," he went on, "that you're our only hope. *Think,* man! There must be something—some circumstance, some little incident that's eluded you up to now—that can make it certain one way or the other."

I got up to pace, straining at the bonds of my memory. I wished fervently that I had not suddenly been saddled with this monstrous responsibility, but since I had—I stopped in my tracks. A circumstance *had* occurred to me.

"Maybe, General," I said. "Just maybe."

Back in the conference room, luncheon trays were served to us. Over soup and sandwiches we continued to reminisce about the old Berlin days. Now, as we poured coffee and lighted cigarettes, I asked, "By the way, Mike, what ever happened to Uschi,"

"Uschi?" He looked at me inquiringly.

"Don't you remember the pretty young blonde we met one evening in the beergarden on Koenigstrasse?"

"The beergarden on Koenig—of course, of course, Lenny! How could I have forgotten? Uschi."

"We saw a lot of her after that evening. She loved to dance and we found her great company." (*She was the first and only* German with whom I'd ever established any kind of personal rapport.)

"As you say, my friend." He nodded vigorously.

We smoked in silence for a few moments. Then, as if a sudden recollection had burst upon me, I exclaimed, "Mike!"

"Yes?"

"You saw her again—afterwards."

"Uschi? I saw her again?"

"You wrote me about it—maybe three or four years later. She had married and was living in East Germany. Her husband was a government official, they had come to Moscow for some sort of conference, and she looked you up. Don't you remember, Mike?"

He seemed to be searching his memory; then he clapped a hand

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to his forehead. *"Da!* Yes, yes, now I remember—"

"She was happy, you wrote me. They were raising a family; two little girls, I think you said."

"Two girls, correct."

"And you never saw her again after that?"

"No, Lenny. After that one time in Moscow, not." He looked at me with a wry little smile that was half an apology and half an entreaty. "It has been so many years, my friend, so many busy years. One cannot remember everything."

"No," I agreed, "one cannot remember everything."

The lieutenant buzzed me into Hyatt's inner sanctum. The general turned his piercing gaze on me and his chin jutted out challengingly. "Well, Foster?"

"You can forget it, General," I said. "If that man is Mikail Zigorin, I'm Napoleon Bonaparte."

He let that sink in, then: "Positive? You'd be willing to take an oath on it?"

I held up my right hand. "On my honor as a reserve officer in the Army of the United States."

He sighed, an enormous sigh. "How were you able to smoke him out?" he asked.

"Why—" I glanced at my watch. So much had happened since I had arrived, innocent and unsuspecting, at my office that morning that it seemed inconceivable it was only a little after two o'clock. "I'll answer that question in a minute, sir. But is there any reason I can't be home in Scarsdale in time for dinner?"

"Mmm. That can probably be managed."

"Then may I call my wife and tell her so? I'm sure she's been concerned about me since your people phoned to tell her that I might be away overnight."

Hyatt considered my request for a moment, then he pressed an intercom button and instructed the lieutenant to have the call put through. In a minute the phone rang and the general motioned for me to pick it up.

"Hello," I said.

"Lenny, that is you? You are all right?"

"Fine. And I'll be home for dinner."

"I do not understand, darling. What has been happening?"

"Oh—nothing much, really; little misunderstanding. I'll tell you about it when I see you. Okay?"

"Okay. 'Bye, Lenny."

" 'Bye, Uschi."

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a MISS MARPLE detective story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

You are cordially invited to attend the first meeting of The Tuesday Night Club of St. Mary Mead, England, and meet the six members—a writer, an artist, a former Commissioner of Scotland Yard, a clergyman, a lawyer, and, of course, a village spinster—the last none other than Miss Jane Marple herself. Here is the case in which Miss Marple made her debut as an armchair detective in the great tradition—the case of a husband, his wife, and his wife's companion who had supper together; the main course was tinned lobster, which all three ate—but only one of the three died . . .

You could hardly imagine a more typical Miss Marple case, or for that matter, a more typical Agatha Christie short story . . .

THE TUESDAY NIGHT CLUB

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"UNSOLVED MYSTERIES." Raymond West blew out a cloud of smoke and repeated the words with a kind of deliberate self-conscious pleasure.

"Unsolved mysteries."

He looked round him with satisfaction. The room was an old one with broad black beams across the ceiling and it was furnished with good old furniture that belonged to it. Hence Raymond West's approving glance. By profession he was a writer and he liked the atmosphere to be flawless. His Aunt Jane's house always pleased him as the right setting for her personality. He looked across the hearth to where she sat erect in the big grandfather chair.

Miss Jane Marple wore a black brocade dress, very much pinched in round the waist. Mechlin lace was arranged in a cascade down the front of the bodice. She had on black lace mittens, and a black lace cap surmounted the piled-up

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masses of her snowy hair. She was knitting—something white and soft and fleecy. Her faded blue eyes, benign and kindly, surveyed her nephew and her nephew's guests with gentle pleasure.

They rested first on Raymond himself, self-consciously debonair, then on Joyce Lemprière, the artist, with her close-cropped black head and queer hazel-green eyes, then on that well-groomed man of the world, Sir Henry Clithering. There were two other people in the room. Dr. Pender, the elderly clergyman of the parish, and Mr. Petherick, the solicitor, a dried-up little man with eyeglasses which he looked over and not through.

Miss Marple gave a brief moment of attention to all these people and returned to her knitting with a gentle smile on her lips.

Mr. Petherick gave the dry little cough with which he usually prefaced his remarks.

"What is that you say, Raymond? Unsolved mysteries? Ha—and what about them?"

"Nothing about them," said Joyce Lemprière. "Raymond just likes the sound of the words and of himself saying them."

Raymond West threw her a glance of reproach at which she threw back her head and laughed.

"He is a humbug, isn't he, Miss Marple?" she demanded. "You know that, I am sure."

Miss Marple smiled gently at her but made no reply.

"Life itself is an unsolved mystery," said the clergyman gravely.

Raymond sat up in his chair and flung away his cigarette with an impulsive gesture.

"That's not what I mean. I was not talking philosophy," he said. "I was thinking of actual bare prosaic facts, things that have happened and that no one has ever explained."

"I know just the sort of thing you mean, dear," said Miss Marple. "For instance Mrs. Carruthers had a very strange experience yesterday morning. She bought two gills of picked shrimps at Elliot's. She called at two other shops and when she got home she found she did not have the shrimps with her. She went back to the two shops she had visited but the shrimps had completely disappeared. Now that seems to me very remarkable."

"A very fishy story," said Henry Clithering gravely.

"There are, of course, all kinds of possible explanations," said Miss Marple, her cheeks growing slightly pinker with excitement. "For instance, somebody else—"

"My dear Aunt," said Raymond West with some amusement, "I didn't mean that sort of village incident. I was thinking of murders and disappearances—the kind of thing that Sir Henry could tell us about by

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the hour if he liked."

"But I never talk shop," said Sir Henry modestly. "No, I never talk shop."

Sir Henry Clithering had been until lately Commissioner of Scotland Yard.

"I suppose there are a lot of murders and things that never are solved by the police," said Joyce Lemprière.

"That is an admitted fact, I believe," said Mr. Petherick.

"I wonder," said Raymond West, "what class of brain really succeeds best in unraveling a mystery? One always feels that the average police detective must be hampered by lack of imagination."

"That is the layman's point of view," said Sir Henry dryly.

"You really want a committee," said Joyce, smiling. "For psychology and imagination go to the writer—"

She made an ironical bow to Raymond but he remained serious.

"The art of writing gives one an insight into human nature," he said gravely. "One sees, perhaps, motives that the ordinary person would pass by."

"I know, dear," said Miss Marple, "that your books are very clever. But do you think that people are really so unpleasant as you make them out to be?"

"My dear Aunt," said Raymond gently, "keep your beliefs. Heaven forbid that I should in any way shatter them."

"I mean," said Miss Marple, puckering her brow a little as she counted the stitches in her knitting, "that so many people seem to me not to be either bad or good, but simply, you know, very silly."

Mr. Petherick gave his dry little cough again. "Don't you think, Raymond," he said, "that you attach too much weight to imagination? Imagination is a very dangerous thing, as we lawyers know only too well. To be able to sift evidence impartially, to take the facts and look at them as facts—that seems to me the only logical method of arriving at the truth. I may add that in my experience it is the only one that succeeds."

"Bah!" cried Joyce, flinging back her black head indignantly. "I bet I could beat you all at this game. I am not only a woman—and say what you like, women have an intuition that is denied to men—I am an artist as well. I see things that you don't. And then, too, as an artist I have knocked about among all sorts and conditions of people. I know life as darling Miss Marple here cannot possibly know it."

"I don't know about that, dear," said Miss Marple. "Very painful and distressing things happen in villages sometimes."

"May I speak?" said Dr. Pen-

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der smiling. "It is the fashion nowadays to decry the clergy, I know, but we hear things, we know a side of human character which is a sealed book to the outside world."

"Well," said Joyce, "it seems to me we are a pretty representative gathering. How would it be if we formed a Club? What is today? Tuesday? We will call it The Tuesday Night Club. It is to meet every week, and each member in turn has to propound a problem. Some mystery of which they have personal knowledge, and to which, of course, they know the answer. Let me see, how many are we? One, two, three, four, five. We ought really to be six."

"You have forgotten me, dear," said Miss Marple, smiling.

Joyce was slightly taken aback, but she concealed the fact quickly. "That would be lovely, Miss Marple," she said. "I didn't think you would care to play."

"I think it would be very interesting," said Miss Marple, "especially with so many clever gentlemen present. I am afraid I am not clever myself, but living all these years in St. Mary Mead does give one an insight into human nature."

"I am sure your cooperation will be very valuable," said Sir Henry courteously.

"Who is going to start?" said Joyce.

"I think there is no doubt as to that," said Dr. Pender, "when we have the great good fortune to have such a distinguished man as Sir Henry with us—"

He left his sentence unfinished, making a courtly bow in the direction of Sir Henry.

The latter was silent for a minute or two. At last he sighed and recrossed his legs and began: "It is a little difficult for me to select just the kind of thing you want, but I think, as it happens, I know of an instance which fits these conditions very aptly. You may have seen some mention of the case in the papers a year ago. It was laid aside at the time as an unsolved mystery, but, as it happens, the solution came into my hands not very many days ago.

"The facts are very simple. Three people sat down to a supper consisting, among other things, of tinned lobster. Later in the night all three were taken ill and a doctor was hastily summoned. Two of the people recovered, the third one died."

"Ah!" said Raymond approvingly.

"As I say, the facts as such were very simple. Death was considered to be due to ptomaine poisoning, a certificate was given to that effect, and the victim was duly buried. But things did not rest at that."

Miss Marple nodded her head.

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"There was talk, I suppose," she said. "There usually is."

"And now I must describe the actors in this little drama. I will call the husband and wife Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and the wife's companion Miss Clark. Mr. Jones was a traveler for a firm of manufacturing chemists. He was a good-looking man in a kind of coarse, florid way, aged about fifty. His wife was a rather commonplace woman, of about forty-five. The companion, Miss Clark, was a woman of sixty, a stout cheery woman with a beaming rubicund face. None of them, you might say, very interesting.

"Now the beginning of the troubles arose in a very curious way. Mr. Jones had been staying the previous night at a small commercial hotel in Birmingham. It happened that the blotting paper in the blotting book had been put in fresh that day, and the chambermaid, having apparently nothing better to do, amused herself by studying the blotter in the mirror just after Mr. Jones had been writing a letter there.

"A few days later there was a report in the papers of the death of Mrs. Jones as the result of eating tinned lobster, and the chambermaid then imparted to her fellow servants the words that she had deciphered on the blotting pad. They were as follows: 'Entirely dependent on my wife . . . when she is dead I . . . hundreds and thousands. . .'

"You may remember that there had recently been a case of a wife being poisoned by her husband. It needed very little to fire the imagination of these maids. Mr. Jones had planned to do away with his wife and inherit hundreds of thousands of pounds! As it happened one of the maids had relations living in the market town where the Joneses resided. She wrote to them, and they in return wrote to her. Mr. Jones, it seemed, had been very attentive to the local doctor's daughter, a good-looking young woman of thirty-three.

"Scandal began to hum. The Home Secretary was petitioned. Numerous anonymous letters poured into Scotland Yard all accusing Mr. Jones of having murdered his wife. Now I may say that not for one moment did we think there was anything in it except idle village talk and gossip. Nevertheless, to quiet public opinion an exhumation order was granted.

"It was one of these cases of popular superstition based on nothing solid whatever, which proved to be surprisingly justified. As a result of the autopsy, sufficient arsenic was found to make it quite clear that the deceased lady had died of arsenical poisoning. It was for Scotland Yard working with the local authorities to prove how that arsenic had

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been administered, and by whom."

"Ah!" said Joyce. "I like this. This is the real stuff."

"Suspicion naturally fell on the husband. He benefited by his wife's death. Not to the extent of the hundreds of thousands romantically imagined by the hotel chambermaid, but to the very solid amount of £8000. He had no money of his own apart from what he earned, and he was a man of somewhat extravagant habits with a partiality for the society of women. We investigated as delicately as possible the rumor of his attachment to the doctor's daughter; but while it seemed clear that there had been a strong friendship between them at one time, there had been a most abrupt break two months previously, and they did not appear to have seen each other since.

"The doctor himself, an elderly man of a straightforward and unsuspicious type, was dumbfounded at the result of the autopsy. He had been called in about midnight to find all three people suffering. He had realized immediately the serious condition of Mrs. Jones, and had sent back to his dispensary for some opium pills, to allay the pain. In spite of all his efforts, however, she succumbed, but not for a moment did he suspect that anything was amiss. He was convinced that her death was due to a form of botulism. Supper that night had consisted of tinned lobster and salad, trifle for dessert, and bread and cheese.

"Unfortunately none of the lobster remained—it had all been eaten and the tin thrown away. He had interrogated the young maid, Gladys Linch. She was terribly upset, very tearful and agitated, and he found it hard to get her to keep to the point, but she declared again and again that the tin had not been distended in any way and that the lobster had appeared to her in a perfectly good condition.

"Such were the facts we had to go upon. If Jones had feloniously administered arsenic to his wife, it seemed clear that it could not have been done in any of the things eaten at supper, as all three persons had partaken of the meal. Also—another point—Jones himself had returned from Birmingham just as supper was being brought in, so that he would have had no opportunity of tampering with any of the food beforehand."

"What about the companion?" asked Joyce, "the stout woman with the good-humored face."

Sir Henry nodded. "We did not neglect Miss Clark, I can assure you. But it seemed doubtful what motive she could have had for the crime. Mrs. Jones left her no legacy of any kind and the net result of her employer's death was

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that she had to seek another position."

"That seems to leave her out of it," said Joyce thoughtfully.

"Now one of my Inspectors soon discovered a significant fact," went on Sir Henry. "After supper on that evening Mr. Jones had gone down to the kitchen and had demanded a bowl of corn flour for his wife who had complained of not feeling well. He had waited in the kitchen until Gladys Linch prepared it, and then carried it up to his wife's room himself. That, I admit, seemed to clinch the case."

The lawyer nodded. "Motive," he said, ticking the point off on his fingers. "Opportunity. As a traveler for a firm of chemists, easy access to the poison."

"And a man of weak moral fiber," said the clergyman.

Raymond West was staring at Sir Henry. "There is a catch in this somewhere," he said. "Why did you not arrest him?"

Sir Henry smiled rather wryly. "That is the unfortunate part of the case. So far all had gone swimmingly, but now we come to the snags. Jones was not arrested because on interrogating Miss Clark she told us that the whole of the bowl of cornflour was drunk not by Mrs. Jones but by her."

"Yes, it seems that she went to Mrs. Jones's room as was her custom. Mrs. Jones was sitting up in bed and the bowl of cornflour was beside her.

" 'I am not feeling a bit well, Milly,' she said. 'Serves me right, I suppose, for touching lobster at night. I asked Albert to get me a bowl of cornflour, but now that I have got it I don't seem to fancy it.'

" 'A pity,' commented Miss Clark "and it is nicely made too, no lumps. Gladys is really quite a good cook. Very few girls nowadays seem to be able to make a bowl of cornflour nicely. I declare I quite fancy it myself, I am that hungry.'

" 'I should think you were with your foolish ways,' said Mrs. Jones.

"I must explain," broke off Sir Henry, "that Miss Clark, alarmed at her increasing stoutness, was doing a course of what is popularly known as 'banting.'

" 'It is not good for you, Milly, it really isn't,' urged Mrs. Jones. 'If the Lord made you stout he meant you to be stout. You drink up that bowl of cornflour. It will do you all the good in the world.'

"And straightaway Miss Clark did in fact finish the bowl. So, you see, that knocked our case against the husband to pieces. Asked for an explanation of the words on the blotting book Jones gave one readily enough. The letter, he explained, was in answer to one written from his brother in Australia who had applied to

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him for money. He had written, pointing out that he was entirely dependent on his wife. When his wife was dead he would have control of money and would assist his brother if possible. He regretted his inability to help but pointed out that there were hundreds and thousands of people in the world in the same plight."

"And so the case fell to pieces?" said Dr. Pender.

"And so the case fell to pieces," said Sir Henry gravely. "We could not take the risk of arresting Jones with nothing more to go upon."

There was a silence and then Joyce said, "And that is all?"

"That is the case as it has stood for the last year. The true solution is now in the hands of Scotland Yard, and in two or three days' time you will probably read of it in the newspapers."

"The true solution," said Joyce thoughtfully. "I wonder. Let's all think for five minutes and then speak."

Raymond West nodded and noted the time on his watch. When the five minutes were up he looked over at Dr. Pender.

"Will you speak first?" he said.

The old man shook his head. "I confess," he said, "that I am utterly baffled. I can but think that the husband must be the guilty party, but how he did it I cannot imagine. I can only suggest that he must have given her the poison in some way that has not yet been discovered, although how in that case it should have come to light after all this time I cannot imagine."

"Joyce?"

"The companion!" said Joyce decidedly. "The companion every time! How do we know what motive she may have had? Just because she was old and stout it doesn't follow that she wasn't in love with Jones herself. And she may have hated the wife for some other reason. Think of being a companion—always having to be pleasant and agree and bottle yourself up. One day she couldn't bear it any longer and she killed her. She probably put the arsenic in the bowl of cornflour and all that story about eating it herself is a lie."

"Mr. Petherick?"

The lawyer joined the tips of his fingers together professionally. "I should hardly like to say."

"But you have got to, Mr. Petherick," said Joyce. "You can't reserve judgment and say 'without prejudice,' and be legal about it. You have got to play the game."

"On the facts," said Mr. Petherick, "there seems nothing to be said. It is my private opinion, having seen, alas, too many cases of this kind, that the husband was guilty. The only explanation that will cover the facts seems to be that Miss Clark for some reason or other deliberately shielded him. There may have

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been some financial arrangement between them. He might realize that he would be suspected, and she, seeing only a future of poverty before her, may have agreed to tell the story of drinking the cornflour in return for a substantial sum to be paid to her privately. If that was the case it was most irregular—most irregular indeed."

"I disagree with you all," said Raymond. "You have forgotten the one important factor in the case, *The doctor's daughter*. I will give you my reading of the case. The tinned lobster was bad. It accounted for the poison symptoms. The doctor was sent for. He finds Mrs. Jones, who has eaten more lobster than the others, in great pain, and he sends, as you told us, for some opium pills. He does not go himself, he *sends*. Who will give the messenger the opium pills? Clearly his daughter. Very likely she dispenses his medicines for him. She is in love with Jones and at this moment all the worst instincts in her nature rise and she realizes that the means to procure his freedom are in her hands. The pills she sends contain pure white arsenic. That is my solution."

"And now, Sir Henry, tell us," said Joyce eagerly.

"One moment," said Sir Henry. "Miss Marple has not yet spoken."

"Dear, dear," she said. "I have dropped another stitch. I have been so interested in the story. A sad case, a very sad case. It reminds me of old Mr. Hargraves who lived up at the Mount. His wife never had the least suspicion—until he died, leaving all his money to a woman he had been living with and by whom he had had five children. She had at one time been their housemaid. Such a nice girl, Mrs. Hargraves always said—thoroughly to be relied upon to turn the mattresses every day—except Fridays, of course. And there was old Hargraves keeping this woman in a house in the neighboring town and continuing to be a Churchwarden and to hand round the plate every Sunday."

"My dear Aunt Jane," said Raymond with some impatience. "What have dead and gone Hargraveses to do with it?"

"This story made me think of him at once," said Miss Marple. "The facts are so very alike, aren't they? I suppose the poor girl has confessed now and that is how you know, Sir Henry."

"What girl?" said Raymond. "My dear Aunt, what are you talking about?"

"That poor girl, Gladys Linch, of course—the one who was so terribly agitated when the doctor spoke to her—and well she might be, poor thing. I hope that wicked Jones is hanged, I am sure, making that poor girl a murderess.

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I suppose they will hang her too, poor thing."

"I think, Miss Marple, that you are under a slight misapprehension," began Mr. Petherick.

But Miss Marple shook her head obstinately and looked across at Sir Henry. "I am right, am I not? It seems so clear to me. The hundreds and thousands—and the trifle for dessert—I mean, one cannot miss it."

"What about the trifle and the hundreds and thousands?" cried Raymond.

His aunt turned to him. "Cooks nearly always put hundreds and thousands on trifle, dear," she said. "Those little pink and white sugar things. Of course, when I heard that they had had trifle for supper and that the husband had been writing to someone about hundreds and thousands, I naturally connected the two things together. That is where the arsenic was—in the hundreds and thousands. He left it with the girl and told her to put on the trifle."

"But that is impossible," said Joyce. "They all ate the trifle."

"Oh, no," said Miss Marple. "The companion was banting, you remember. You never eat anything like trifle if you are banting; and I expect Jones just scraped the hundreds and thousands off his share and left them at the side of his plate. It was a clever idea, but a very wicked one."

The eyes of the others were all fixed on Sir Henry.

"It is a very curious thing," he said slowly, "but Miss Marple happens to have hit upon the truth. Jones had got Gladys Linch into trouble, as the saying goes. She was nearly desperate. He wanted his wife out of the way and promised to marry Gladys when his wife was dead. He poisoned the hundreds and thousands and gave them to her with instructions how to use them. Gladys Linch died a week ago. Her child died at birth and Jones had deserted her for another woman. When she was dying she confessed the truth."

There was a few moments' silence and then Raymond said, "Well, Aunt Jane, this is one up to you. I can't think how on earth you managed to hit upon the truth. I should never have thought of the little maid in the kitchen being connected with the case."

"No, dear," said Miss Marple, "but you don't know as much of life as I do. A man of that Jones's type—coarse and jovial. As soon as I heard there was a pretty young girl in the house I felt sure that he would not have left her alone. It is all very distressing and painful, and not a very nice thing to talk about. I can't tell you the shock it was to Mrs. Hargraves, and how it was a nine days' wonder in the village."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 343rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . first stories are not usually supersophisticated, or sinfully cynical; but you'll find that this one is—ironically so . . .

At the time of this writing the author, Mrs. J. Cady Mandarino, is a 40-year-old housewife with four children. She was born near Boston, was graduated from Radcliffe in 1950, and spent the next five years as a WAVE officer during the Korean War. In 1955 she returned to school for her Master's degree. Here, at the University of Michigan, she met her husband-to-be, who was working on his doctorate in Mineralogy. In 1959 they moved to Toronto where Mr. Mandarino became curator at the Royal Ontario Museum.

Mrs. Mandarino's only previous publication was a piece based on fact which appeared in "Critic Magazine" in 1961. "Future Unlimited" is her first fiction, and the idea for the story came to her during a sabbatical spent in France two years ago . . .

FUTURE UNLIMITED

by J. CADY MANDARINO

IN THE COCKTAIL BAR OF THE Squash Club, George Denby sipped his Manhattan and smiled in approval. "Ah, excellent. You Americans make the most splendid Manhattans. Now, let's talk about you, Wallace. You say your wife is impossible?"

"She's driving me crazy with her constant criticism, George. She's the original, 'I-don't-see-why' girl." He mimicked a falsetto voice. " 'I don't see why you want another drink, Wally; you know how it goes to your head.' Or 'I don't see why you want to play golf at your age.' Or 'I don't see why you stay with Aldrich and Tate; what have they ever done for you?' "

George Denby clucked. "Why don't you get rid of her?"

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Wally Fair almost choked on his cherry. He gazed admiringly at George. There was nobody like George, all right. Aldrich and Tate had recruited George Denby three years ago in London, and Denby's sublime self-confidence had so inspired clients that now the Englishman was Vice-President in Charge of Securities. When Denby had invited him for a cocktail after work, Wally had felt deeply flattered. He sighed. "I can't get rid of Jennifer, George. Religion, you know."

"So?"

"Her religion doesn't condone divorce."

George Denby lit a cigarette and blew a perfect smoke ring. "I meant, get rid of her—kill her."

"Kill her!"

"With an overdose of sleeping pills, perhaps—no fuss, no muss, no bother."

"Oh, I couldn't. Not murder!"

"Well, if you can't divorce her and if murder is out of the question—though personally I don't understand your squeamishness—why not have yourself killed?"

"How would that help?"

"Not really killed, of course. There's an organization that arranges these things. Future Unlimited, it's called. A most reputable firm. I happen to be a member of the Board. Our clientele is of the very highest calibre; remember when J. Henry Parsons was swept overboard from his yacht?"

"Yes."

"Our work. And Robert Masterson in that sleeping-pill accident?"

"Him, too?"

"Oh, yes. We're proud of our reputation." George Denby raised his chin. "When our clients go they often make page one of *The New York Times*."

"But how do you fake a death?"

"We flash-freeze our clients, like frozen food pellets. Then we dry them out to their original consistency. A scientist named Dr. Lee Wong, who was working on longevity problems at MIT, stumbled on the idea. It's taken years to perfect; I don't know the exact scientific details, of course, but it works on the principle of suspended animation. To all intents and purposes the subject is dead. His heart stops beating, his brain waves stop; all bodily functions cease. And yet, Dr. Wong can revive the patient at any time."

"Incredible!"

"Isn't it? So far we've arranged more than a hundred deaths without a single fatality. And with plastic surgery on hands and face, the resuscitated clients can go anywhere in the world without fear of recognition."

"I wish I had the nerve."

"Don't worry, dear boy. If the

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need becomes urgent enough, you will."

As he left the Squash Club, Wally caught his reflection in the mirror at the head of the stairway. He looked middle-aged, nondescript, and harassed. He would never become a Vice-President at Aldrich and Tate. He would always be stuck with the unimportant accounts—the nobodies with modest legacies, the widows with small nest eggs, the old-age pensioners husbanding their slender savings. In the club car of his commuter train Wally drank all the way to Westport.

When he arrived home, Jennifer was waiting in the doorway with a scowl on her face. She was a thin woman of 36. Childless, she had retained her figure, but in the past few years a ferretlike appearance had begun to form on her once-pretty face.

"Wallace Fair! I don't see why you're an hour and a half late coming home from the office. I certainly didn't hold dinner for you; you'll have to get your own."

"I was having a drink with a colleague, dear—George Denby."

"Who's he?"

"Vice-President in Charge of Securities."

"Vice-President! Why would a Vice-President want to drink with you. What's he after?"

"Nothing. Just a friendly drink."

"With you, a junior investment officer? I don't see why he'd waste his time with a nobody."

"He was worried about my health."

"Your health! What's the matter with your health? Dr. Bisbee checked you out last month and said you were perfectly sound. You've always looked colorless and washed-out. I don't see why he conned you with that story. What did you talk about?"

"Oh, you know—business—tips on the market—"

"Tips." She snorted. "They've never even trusted you with a big account, I don't see why they're listening to your tips all of a sudden. What have you got that George Denby wants?"

Wally had a sudden inspiration. "George Denby's a compulsive drinker. We were both working late tonight and happened to go down in the elevator together. There was no one but me to ask."

Jennifer snorted again.

Wally could hardly wait to have lunch with George Denby the next day. In a quiet corner of a restaurant, over their first Manhattan, Wally said, "I've changed my mind, George."

The Englishman nodded imperturbably. "Of course. Have you any special place you want to be shipped?"

"Shipped? What do you mean?"

"A fringe benefit. We feel a

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trip is in order after your exhumation. Dr. Wong and his associates will recover the box from its final resting place and ship you anywhere in the world."

"Well, I've always wanted to see Rio," Wally said slowly.

"Splendid. The weather there is perfect at this time of year. Our man in Rio will accept the shipment and have you back on your feet in no time."

Wally twisted his glass nervously. "I suppose this is all very expensive."

"Oh, quite. The afternoon of your departure, I suggest that you abscond with a large sum of money from the firm. They'll never feel it. Think of it as your early retirement, your layaway plan. It will defray the costs of your removal as well as cushion the transition to a new life."

"You mean, embezzle?"

George Denby looked shocked. "Nothing so crass, dear boy. You simply transfer the funds to our company—to Future Unlimited. The loss won't be discovered for some time, and it will never be traced to you. We have a wizard of a bookkeeper who fixes these things."

"How much should I take?"

"I always advise my clients to take as much as they can."

"How will you arrange my—uh—"

"Demise? A simple heart attack. As your evening train leaves Grand Central Station you take this pill." He handed Wally a small white capsule. "In half an hour you'll feel drowsy and fall asleep. That's all there is to it."

Wally started to say something but George Denby stopped him with an uplifted hand. "We always tell our clients to relax and leave all the tiresome details to us."

"All right."

"Now, when would you like to go?"

"As soon as possible."

"Splendid. Next Friday, then?"

On Friday the plan went off according to schedule. Wally took $300,000 in bonds, securities, and cash and gave all of it to George to transfer to Future Unlimited.

At 5:50 p.m. Wally boarded the train from Grand Central. Getting a drink of water from the fountain at the end of the car, he swallowed the pill. While passing through White Plains he fell into a deep and dreamless sleep which resembled death . . .

When the police notified Jennifer of Wally's succumbing, she said, "I don't see why he should drop dead, he was perfectly healthy when he left here this morning. And Dr. Bisbee looked him over only last month. I don't see why a perfectly healthy man of forty-two should have a heart attack."

And so she ordered an autopsy.

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Are we experiencing a renaissance of the Locked Room mystery? It appears so—more locked-room detective stories have been submitted to EQMM in recent months than usually come our way in years; indeed, there have been periods in the past when not a single new locked-room story turned up from one lustrum to another. But, happily, the locked-room 'tec theme is now being revived, with more ingenious plots that you would expect in this, the 129th year of the detective story. And here, for your mystification, is an especially clever conception . . .

THE BIZARRE CASE EXPERT

by WILLIAM ARDEN

IN OUR CITY BEFORE A CASE ends up in the Unsolved File it comes to the Central Squad, Inspector Frank Stockton in command. Most of the jobs at Central are big touchy cases like rackets, narcotics rings, bank holdups, counterfeiting, and the like. But not all.

Central gets anything that stumps the precinct squads—what we call the "circus cases." Or, to be more exact, I get them: Detective Sergeant Joseph Marx, the one-man Circus Case Squad.

This one began in the Tenth Precinct on Diamond Hill, one of our richer sections. I got it at 4:10 P.M. on a Monday. The Inspector gave me the word himself.

"What's their problem?" I asked warily.

"Well," the Inspector said solemnly, "it seems that they don't exactly know. Maybe it's a locked room or a perfect alibi or a vanished weapon. What I do know is, it's two days old."

"Two days? And they still don't know what the problem is?"

"They know they're in a hole. So go dig them out. Fast."

"I'll be back tonight."

I wasn't. It was the start of a long haul, but I didn't know that then. What I knew was, I was getting a reputation that wasn't good for me—The Circus Case Man. It could ruin me with my colleagues; they don't like hotshots.

It didn't seem as if Lieutenant

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George Mastro thought I was a hot-shot. The Chief of the Tenth's Detective Squad looked as if he were sorry for me.

"We're stumped on this one, and so is Homicide," Mastro said bluntly. "How do you want to start?"

"I'll read the reports, if that's okay with you."

"Fine. Maybe you can spot something we've missed."

The first report was by Patrolman Sid Lewis in the tortured style of a man who agonized over paperwork. At 12:22 A.M. Saturday night Lewis and his partner, Patrolman Ed Lincoln, went to 1415 Laguna Terrace to investigate a complaint of noise.

They found 1415 Laguna Terrace to be a new apartment house with a well-lighted lobby and a doorman. In the lobby they met the manager, the doorman, and two female tenants. The two women were irate over the noise being made by "that tramp in 6-B."

The manager had a different view, and said, in Lewis' stilted words, "Mrs. Sally Tower is an excellent tenant. She is a well-known interior decorator, and a lady. Her only visitors, so far as I know, are her business associates, her fiancé Mr. Tolliver, and her ex-husband. She is not a giver of noisy parties."

The ladies, according to Lewis who wrote down every detail he could remember whether it seemed important or not, had more to say about Mrs. Tower, including: "Crazy way she dresses!"—"That sick apartment!"—"Arty egghead with no morals!" Lewis put it all down, apparently on the way up to 6-B. When he got there all was quiet in 6-B.

With the ladies and the manager in tow, Lewis knocked on the door. There was no response; no sounds at all.

"She's in there all right," said a lady, later identified as Mrs. Kuzco. "I've been watching her door. Yelling and shouting something awful!"

Lewis asked the manager to use his passkey. The manager did, but it turned out that the door was chained on the inside. Suspicious of the total silence, Lewis and Lincoln managed to kick the door in.

At that point Lewis and Lincoln were busy for a few minutes. The ladies screamed. The manager actually fainted. People poured out of other apartments to stare at the carnage.

The reason for the silence in 6-B was now clear: murder.

Lewis officially reported the scene: "After restoring order I crossed a large foyer into a living room. The room was in great disorder from some violent struggle.

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"A female Caucasian, aged about 30 years, lay on the floor near a bedroom door. There was considerable blood, all fresh. I ascertained her condition, bloodying my person and uniform, and found her to be dead.

"A male Caucasian, aged about 40, lay some feet away, near a dining table. He was unconscious, bloody, breathing in a shallow manner, but was not dead.

"I observed that the window to the fire escape was open. The manager having revived, I asked him to identify the body, and sent Patrolman Lincoln to examine the area beneath the fire escape. The manager having examined the female body, identified her as Mrs. Sally Tower. He identified the injured man as Mr. Paul Tower, her ex-husband. I then called the precinct and reported. The time was 12:32 A.M. I remained in the apartment until the arrival of detectives."

Patrolman Lincoln's report added only that he had found nothing in the yard or basement, that the yard was all concrete, that the other buildings were close and had similar yards. I turned to the report of the Medical Examiner.

Mrs. Sally Tower, 32, had died of multiple blows to her head by a blunt instrument. Her left arm was broken, and her head had four distinct skull fractures. She had died between 12:00 midnight and 12:45 A.M. Since the patrolmen had arrived at 12:28, and the noise had ceased about 12:20, the time of murder was fixed in those eight minutes.

Paul Tower, 40, had suffered concussion, a hairline skull fracture, and a broken nose, all from two blows to the head. According to the M.E., Tower had been unconscious about thirty minutes when the M.E. arrived at 12:50 A.M. The one blow on the cranium, in the M.E.'s opinion, had rendered Tower instantly unconscious. The M.E. had revived Tower who was now in good condition in the hospital.

Paul Tower's own statement came in two parts. The first statement, unsigned, had been given at 12:57 A.M. when he had regained consciousness: "A man, tall, masked—came in window, didn't see—too late. He hit me. I fell. Sally? Where's Sally? Tell me . . ."

Tower's formal statement had been taken at 10:00 A.M. Sunday morning in the hospital:

"I called on my ex-wife, Mrs. Sally Tower, at 10.00 P.M. Saturday night. I went to ask her what plans she had to marry Max Tolliver. She informed me that she was seriously considering remarriage, which was good news. We had a few drinks on it and became a little intoxicated. Yes, we made considerable noise.

"Shortly after midnight I be-

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came aware of a man in the room, wearing work clothes. I challenged him. Sally screamed—more than once, I'm sure. I attempted to defend us, but he hit me with a small statue. I fell and must have struck my head. I remember nothing more until I was revived by the police."

I sat back and stared at the reports. I didn't read any more, but went to find Lieutenant Mastro.

"What is this?" I said. "Looks like a routine killing by a prowler, that's all."

"Yeah," Mastro said, and stood up. "Except that it isn't routine and it wasn't a prowler."

In the back seat of the squad car on our way to 1415 Laguna Terrace, Mastro told me, "We too were sure at first. Even after we found that nothing was disturbed in any other room, and nothing was missing. We figured the intruder panicked and ran right after killing. So we started the normal routine.

"We found no evidence of an intruder anywhere. Nothing that didn't belong in the place, and no fingerprints except Mrs. Tower's, Paul Tower's, some of her business friends, and the apartment-house manager."

"The killer must have worn gloves and was careful. Obviously Tower didn't notice the gloves."

Mastro shrugged and went on, "A panicky prowler usually leaves *some* evidence, but okay, let's say he was lucky. So we started on the neighbors. That's when the roof fell in. You remember Mrs. Kuzco in Lewis' report? She was watching the front door of 6-B and swears no one came out after midnight.

"Anyway, the front door of 6-B was chained on the inside. So was the back door. There're no other doors. All the windows are sheer drops, and besides, were locked on the inside. Except the open fire-escape window.

"A Mrs. Miller in apartment 1-B stated she'd been sitting at her window directly under the fire escape all evening. She's an invalid. She likes to look out of that window. She saw no one go up or come down the fire escape all night. Everyone else with a window facing the fire escape was home, and no prowler entered their apartments.

"A Mr. Bugatti, in the building directly behind our 6-B, had been attracted by the noise in 6-B, so he too was watching the fire-escape window. He saw no one go in or out. He saw no one go down the fire escape to the yard, or up the fire escape to the roof.

"In other words, Marx, there's no way anyone could have left 6-B except by the fire-escape window—and no one went through that window."

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I sat and let it sink in. The classical locked room. Only there isn't any such thing. There's *always* an explanation. Except in this case I couldn't see one. Unless I could find some flaw in what Mastro had told me.

The lobby of the building was bright and bare. The only way out was past the doorman. The door of 6-B opened into the apartment foyer that Patrolman Lewis had described.

The foyer hit me hard. I saw why the ladies of 1415 Laguna Terrace hadn't taken to Mrs. Tower. She had been a very "arty" interior decorator, all right.

The foyer walls were purple. The rug had purple and white stripes. The ancient, upright-style telephone was painted lavender and had a rhinestone-encrusted dial in a lavender marble base. The phone stood on a side table made from a Colonial washstand—complete with chamber pot. A grotesque hat tree was topped with a boar's head. There was a beautifully simple, genuine 17th Century bench next to a sideboard in fake marble that was the cheapest modern.

Mrs. Tower had been in the thick of the latest fad for odd decoration and old-fashioned ugliness, and the living room was a lot more of the same. It was a chaos of ugly Victorian, clean 17th Century, and ultramodern—mixed with things like rotted old fire bellows when there wasn't even a fireplace.

Mastro pointed to the spots where the bodies had been found. The marble statue used on Tower was on the floor near a heavy table. There was blood on the statue, and a deep mark on a table leg.

I checked every way out I could think of—even from inside the closets. There were only the two doors and the fire-escape window. Modern apartments don't have secret panels.

"Okay," I said, "so there's no way out. I don't believe in magic, so it has to be Tower himself. They fought, maybe she hit him with the statue and broke his nose, he went crazy and hammered her to death. In the struggle he fell and hit his head and was knocked out. She may even have died after he became unconscious."

Mastro nodded. "The M.E. thinks she did. He thinks she was alive when he was knocked out, which fits his story."

"But he has to be lying. No one could have come into this room."

"He's got the motive," Mastro agreed. "He was paying big alimony, and he wanted to marry a Dolores Finch, but he couldn't afford to marry again unless the alimony stopped. That could happen only if Mrs. Tower married again, and her fiancé, Tolliver,

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said she wouldn't set a definite date. She had Tower in a bind."

"They brawled about it, she hit him, and he went berserk. It's the kind of motive that makes a man go crazy. He had to beg, and she probably laughed at him."

"Sounds fine," Mastro agreed.

That was when I got the uneasy feeling. Mastro was agreeing too easily—and besides, they hadn't arrested Tower.

"Okay," I said, "what's the kicker this time?"

Mastro shrugged. "We can't find the weapon that killed Mrs. Tower. It isn't in the room."

No weapon? In a room that no one had left?

"Impossible," I said.

"Sure," Mastro said, "but the M.E. and the lab insist that nothing we found could have killed her. The M.E. says the weapon was solid and sort of circular and narrow. It had to be pretty long to hit so deep. The statue doesn't fit. There are two pokers, but they don't fit. We found a hammer, but that doesn't fit. Two paperweights are all wrong in size and shape.

"Most of the lamps would fit the wounds, but none of them had any blood, hair or bone on them, or Tower's prints. Nothing we gave the lab had blood, hair, skin or bone on it, and nothing had Tower's prints. Her prints were on the statue that she hit Tower with, but she sure didn't hit herself."

"Tower got rid of it."

"We searched the whole place, every square inch, and outside the windows for at least two hundred feet. No holes, no water, nothing in the trees, no drainpipes, and nothing hanging. Anyway, he *couldn't* have gotten rid of it."

"How do you figure that?"

"The M.E. said that Tower was knocked out the instant he got that blow on the cranium. There's no way a man can hit his own head hard enough to knock himself out for that long, or make that bad a wound, except by running full speed into a wall."

I nodded. "In other words Tower had to fall violently to hit his head that hard."

"That's it," Mastro said. "If he battled with his wife she somehow knocked him out before she collapsed herself. And if he was knocked out *during* the brawl, or just as it ended, he couldn't have gotten a weapon out of the room. So it has to be here."

I looked around the garish room. I looked at everything Mastro hadn't taken away to be examined. There was nothing that fitted the requirements. The vases were too light. The pitchers, jugs, ashtrays were too small. Nothing movable was shaped right or hard enough.

"Of course," Mastro said, "If Tower *is* telling the truth, then

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it fits fine. The prowler carried off the weapon."

"Okay," I said, "then the witnesses made some mistake."

"That puts you right on our schedule," Mastro said. He was not being sarcastic. He was serious. "That's what we decided, and that's when the Captain figured a new man could help."

"I've been a big help," I said.

"You're helping. Do we try the witnesses again?"

"We try," I said. "One thing. I'd rule out a prowler or burglar. I've been thinking—a prowler wouldn't go into a lighted room where two people were partying out loud. I think it had to be someone who knew them, or at least her."

"That's good, I didn't think of that," Mastro said; "but I did check all the men in her life. They all have alibis."

"How good?"

"Airtight. For instance, the boyfriend, Max Tolliver, was in Los Angeles giving a talk until eleven P.M. No doubt."

"What about the women? Tower's lady friend, Dolores Finch, for instance? He wanted to marry her, and the wife was preventing it."

"She doesn't have much of an alibi. Says she was home alone. But Tower says it was a man, a tall man."

"What if Tower and Dolores Finch were in it together? He's lying to give her an alibi."

"Damn!" Mastro said. "Maybe you've got it!"

The Lieutenant was excited. The idea of a plot between Tower and another person could hold the key to how the killer got in and out. Mastro decided to see if he could locate anyone who had seen Dolores Finch leave her apartment Saturday night. I went to talk with the witnesses.

If I was right and Tower had used an accomplice, there still had to be some way the accomplice had got in and out.

This time I was excited, too. It was a good feeling. It didn't last long. The three witnesses were adamant.

"No, I never left the door," Mrs. Kuzco said. "No telephone call. I got no baby, and I wasn't cooking. I tell you, no one came out."

Mrs. Miller said, "I need help to move, Sergeant. I didn't doze and I saw no one at all. No one."

I pressed. "Maybe it was someone you saw but didn't really notice? The manager? A handyman? A woman just acting casual?"

"No one, Sergeant, I'm positive."

Mr. Bugatti across the yard admitted, "I sort of like to watch that window, see? She was a good-looking woman. Saturday I watched real good 'cause she was

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partying. I didn't see no one near that window. Just talking, shouting, banging around."

"Was there movement inside the window after the noise stopped?"

"Nope, not even a shadow. Just awful quiet."

I had to give up. I went back to the Tenth's squadroom. I was still trying to think it out when Mastro came back. He looked as discouraged as I was when he dropped into a chair.

"No one saw the Finch woman leave her place. I checked all the women Mrs. Tower worked with. They're clean. If it was an intruder, Joe, it's going into the Unsolved File. That's it."

There are a lot of cases in the Unsolved File; every cop has at least one, and no cop likes it. Those are the cases you dream about ten years later. You know you missed something, and they still rankle even on the day you retire.

I wouldn't give up. "Let's say the witnesses are right. So let's go back to Tower himself. I've been thinking about his story. It was fast, pat, and the only decent story he could tell. And it absolutely depends on the weapon being missing.

"He couldn't have hidden the weapon, and if he was knocked out in the brawl it doesn't stand to reason he had the story ready before he blacked out. He couldn't have invented the yarn while he was unconscious."

Mastro agreed, "So when did he do it?"

"He had to invent it after he woke up. Say that he actually revived a few minutes before anyone noticed. You were all busy, so you might have missed it."

"Go on," Mastro said.

"He saw something in the apartment that gave him the idea you would miss the weapon. He heard you talking in a way that showed you suspected some prowler. You did think that at the time, right?"

"Yeah. I was sending men out to find witnesses."

"So he heard you, and he saw that maybe you'd miss the weapon. He had nothing to lose by telling a desperate story."

Mastro stood up. "Damn it, let's find that weapon!"

We returned to Apartment 6-B and searched again. We turned that living room upside down. I even tried every table leg to see if it was loose. There just wasn't anything.

"No weapon," Mastro said.

We sat down in that clutter of gaudy and grotesque objects from half a hundred periods of human artifacts. We were grim and bitter.

"You can't win 'em all," Mastro said.

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I didn't answer. I was sitting where I could see all the way across the room into the foyer. Then I saw it.

"Mastro," I said. "Right in front of our eyes!"

He whirled, looked into the foyer. "Where? What?"

"There! The telephone!"

I hurried into the foyer and looked at that purple telephone. An old-fashioned, antique telephone! Upright like a club, made of hard rubber and with a heavy marble base. It fitted the description of the wound, and it had a long, thirty-foot extension cord that would easily reach to where the body of Mrs. Tower had been found.

"So obvious," I said, "That we overlooked it every time! Right in front of our noses, but so familiar we didn't see it. A modern telephone wouldn't be heavy enough, but this one is. It even has blood on it!"

"Yeah," Mastro said. I heard a sad, weary tone in his voice.

I stared at him. "Something wrong?"

Mastro sighed. "I got excited too. But look where it is, Joe."

I looked. It was on the foyer side table where it was obviously supposed to be since the wall connection was there.

"It's twenty feet or more from where the body was," Mastro said. "We know Tower couldn't have gotten any weapon out of the living room before he passed out, right? He couldn't have hit her with the phone, then carried it out to the foyer."

"The blood on it?" I said weakly, feeling my inspiration fade away.

"Lewis used it to call in, Joe. Remember, he had a lot of blood on him from examining Mrs. Tower."

After that there was nothing to do but go back downtown and brood. Mastro had other work to do, and so did I. How long could we work on one impossible case? Inspector Stockton wasn't pleased, but even the Central Squad has to fail sometimes.

I went back to my regular assignments. Up in the Tenth, Mastro continued to comb Diamond Hill for any reports of a prowler. He continued to hammer at the alibis whenever he had the time. Nothing developed, and Tower had to be released when he left the hospital.

But I couldn't get the case out of my mind. I went over and over it lying awake at night, or on stakeouts in other cases. Twice, on my own time, I went up to Diamond Hill and searched the whole ground again. Then after giving it a week's rest I decided to start once more from the beginning.

I began with Patrolman Lewis' report.

And that's when I spotted it.

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Mastro had Lewis and the rest of his men who had worked on the case in his office when I arrived at the Tenth. I started right in on Patrolman Lewis.

"Lewis," I asked, "where was the telephone in the Tower apartment when you used it to call in to precinct?"

"Well," Lewis began, frowning in thought.

"Think, man! Where were you standing when you called?"

Lewis brightened. "Sure, I remember. I was right near the body. Let's see, yeah, the telephone was in the living room on a coffee table near the body."

Mastro blinked at Lewis. "Not in the foyer, Lewis?"

"No, sir," Lewis said firmly. "I remember I was looking down at Mrs. Tower while I talked to you."

I said, "Was it lying on its side? Knocked over?"

"No, Sergeant, it was just standing there regular like."

"You're sure it wasn't on the floor near the body?"

Lewis was shocked. "I wouldn't have touched anything that was on the floor near the body, Sergeant!"

Mastro roared, "But it's in the foyer now! How did it get to the foyer?"

I said, "After you called in, Lewis, where did you put the telephone?"

"Right back where it was," Lewis said, and then he stopped. His eyes blinked. "No, I think maybe I set it out of the way some. Yeah, I remember now. That long cord was tangling up the room, so I set it over on an end table near the wall."

Mastro looked a little stunned. "You moved it? How far?"

"Well, maybe three or four feet, sir. Just across the room a little."

"So how did it get into the foyer?" Mastro demanded.

Mastro's men fidgeted, stammered, and slowly the whole story came out. One after the other, Mastro's men told the saga of that telephone. I listened fascinated.

One detective had called Homicide. He remembered that the telephone had been on an end table in the living room. He moved it to a chest because that damned long cord was always getting in the way.

Another detective had called the laboratory. He put the telephone on a table near the door to the foyer.

A third officer recalled that the ambulance men had used the telephone. He didn't remember where they put it down.

Someone thought that the M.E. had used the telephone. And he was pretty sure the M.E. had been in the foyer when he used it.

I listened in a kind of dream. I could almost see the progress of the telephone across the living

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room and into the foyer. Each police pair of hands moved it another few feet, all innocent, and all oblivious of what they were doing. The peripatetic phone.

Mastro groaned. "I think I even used it myself once."

No one actually recalled wiping the phone, but Lewis said he might have, and the others admitted they might have. Later it turned out that the M.E. had also wiped it when he'd used it in the foyer.

Mastro sent them all out with a snarl of fury. Then he glared at me.

"Okay, that's how it got to the foyer, but how did it get on that coffee table near Sally Tower's body? I mean, Tower was knocked out in the fight. He couldn't have set it upright on that coffee table. Are you saying it just *happened* to fall from his hands after he clobbered her and land upright on the table?"

"Maybe," I said, "but I don't think so."

I went to the door of Mastro's office. I told them to bring in the manager of Laguna Terrace whom I'd called to come down and wait. The manager entered nervously.

"When you went into Mrs. Tower's apartment with the officers," I asked him, "where was the telephone?"

"The telephone? You mean that purple one?" the manager said.

"That purple one," I said.

"Well, let me see," the manager said, thinking. "I fainted, you know—the shock and all. Well, when I revived, the officer asked me to identify the body. I went to the body, yes, and—wait, I remember! The officer was busy for a moment with the other officer and I had to wait. I was standing over poor Mrs. Tower—"

The manager stopped, closed his eyes. "Yes, I was just standing there and waiting. The telephone was lying on the floor near poor Mrs. Tower. The telephone was knocked over and the cord was all tangled up. Very messy. I picked it up, straightened out the cord, and put it on a coffee table."

"You put it on the nearest table," I said softly. "You sort of cleaned up a bit?"

The manager nodded. "Yes, that's it. I'm rather neat about my rooms. One does it automatically, you see? I mean, after a time when you run an apartment house you sort of have a reflex to keep the place neat."

"Automatic," I said. "You see a telephone knocked over, so you just automatically pick it up and put it on a table."

The manager beamed. "Exactly. I hate mess."

After the manager left, Mastro and I just sat there.

"That's what Tower saw when he revived," I said. "He saw the

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telephone standing all tidy on a table quite a distance from the body. He heard you and your men talking about a prowler. He realized you'd probably never think of the telephone. He didn't know how or why it had been removed from where it had fallen after he used it to beat Mrs. Tower, but he saw a chance and invented a prowler."

Mastro looked sick. "He had an accomplice after all—an unconscious, automatic accomplice."

In the end the lab examined that purple telephone with a microscope. It had been wiped pretty good, but it still had traces of fingerprints on it; but more important, they found tiny fragments of bone and hair, and with no other possible killer in that room the jury didn't take long to find Tower guilty.

Inspector Stockton was pleased with me in the end, and up in the Tenth the boys pulled a lot of extra duty for a while. And the Chief issued a loud blast to all precincts—never touch *anything* on the scene of a murder. Nothing! Ever!

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Last month I mentioned London's Detection Club, of which only the late A. A. Milne was elected a full member on the strength of one novel alone. There have been various honorary members, including eminent writers who engage in crime or the sensational without employing straight detection, and police officials of the more exalted kind. The late Sir Hugh Walpole was an honorary member; so was a former Assistant Commissioner of the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard.

But, in general, the member must have written at least two detective novels conforming to certain rules. These rules are defined by an oath which the president, in scarlet robe and chain of office, administers to each new member on initiation. Part of the dialogue runs as follows:

"Do you solemnly swear never to conceal a vital clue from the reader?"

"I do."

"Will you honor the King's English?"

"I will."

"Do you promise that your detectives shall well and truly detect, using only those wits with which you shall be pleased to endow them, and having no traffic with or placing no reliance upon accident, coincidence, feminine intuition, mumbo-jumbo, jiggery-pokery, or Act of God?"

"I do."

"Will you preserve a seemly moderation in the use of conspiracies, gangs, death-rays, ghosts, trap doors, homicidal lunatics, and sinister Chinese, and utterly and forever forswear mysterious poisons unknown to science?"

Then, after the candidate has given other pledges, the president concludes with his terrible warning.

"This night, X.Y., you have sworn a great oath. If ever you do violate one article of that oath, may other writers anticipate your plots, may your publishers do you down in your contracts, may total strangers sue you for libel, may your pages swarm with mis-

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prints and your sales continually diminish."

Well, they had the eccentric judgment to elect me in 1936. And since the oath is not secret, it can be quoted here without violating confidence or copyright.

Though I have attended no gathering of the brethren for more than a decade, membership in that club is for life. I am therefore entitled to wonder how its all-too-critical committee would regard today's omnipresence of cloak and dagger.

We have seen several devices not unlike death-rays, and there are more sinister Chinese than in the palmiest days of Sax Rohmer. The first-rate spy story, let's all agree, *need* not be constructed according to such purist principles as those above. On the other hand, what a joy when it can be and is! Of four titles heartily recommended this month, three are new and three are novels of espionage in the grand manner.

The Smile on the Face of the Tiger by Douglas Hurd and Andrew Osmond (Macmillan, $5.95) must be given high honors. Not only will it satisfy every rule of the Detection Club, but its carefully prepared surprise finale explodes like a mine. Though the main action has been set in the future, we are projected only to the easily imagined future of 1976.

Laurence Pershing, once a British junior during that past war in the Far East, is now a cabinet minister of the ruling Tory government. With an impossible wife but a charming mistress, he can look forward to still more distinction if he is not overtaken by a well-meant error out of his past. When the People's Republic of China demands that the British give up Hong Kong, sending tigerish Chiang Li-shih to London, the error does catch up and Pershing seems finished.

But he is not finished; Chiang Li-shih, the tiger, may have caught an infuriated lion with claws as deadly as his own. After deft move and counter-move, after convincing behind-the-scene glimpses of government both British and Chinese, the action whips at breakneck pace to its sensational end. No better story is likely to be published this year.

Whether or not you yourself have a touch of Scots blood, you will greatly sympathize with Secret Agent John Craig in *The Innocent Bystanders,* by James Munro (Knopf, $5.95). Employed by Department K, British Intelligence, Craig serves a devious M.I. boss who says one thing and means another, being almost as untrustworthy as the enemy.

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Aaron Kaplan, Russian scientist imprisoned for independent thinking, has escaped from Siberia and disappeared. Somewhere in Turkey, Kaplan will defect to the West with his immensely valuable secret if either British or Americans can find him. But Russia wants him too; beware the K.G.B. In theory aided by two British agents he himself has trained, John Craig must rescue the lost scientist and bring him back alive.

Sent to New York for briefing, Craig has several brushes with the K.G.B. (or is it the C.I.A.?) before he gathers up attractive Miriam Loman and lights out for Istanbul. Mayhem, murder roll through the Middle East from Turkey to Cyprus. Everybody is double-crossing everybody else; the British agents themselves seem up to no good; and the person who appears most double-crossed proves the worst double-crosser of all. Let me commend you to another brilliant novel; you alone will never once be double-crossed.

Dorothy Gilman's *The Amazing Mrs. Pollifax* (Doubleday, $4.95) is American espionage with a bang. Don't be suspicious of any spy story written by a woman about a woman. Suspend disbelief in this middle-aged New Jersey widow as a C.I.A. agent, and you will accept Emily Pollifax with liking or even affection.

Once more we are off to Istanbul and the Turkish countryside. Abetted through spectacular exploits by a harum-scarum young Briton and an alleged Greek sailor, despite all violence Mrs. Pollifax has one hell of a good time. Depend on it, so will you.

No fine new straight detection being at hand, let's turn with relief to *The Rasp,* by Philip Macdonald (Avon, 95¢), that classic of the nineteen twenties with which a master craftsman gave us Colonel Anthony Ruthven Gethryn, formerly of the British Secret Service during World War I.

It's an ugly business. Cabinet Minister John Hoode has been messily slain, head battered with the heavy file called a rasp. Everybody looks suspicious because so few look suspicious, including a lovely dark-haired lady who swam the river at night.

Both Mr. Macdonald and Colonel Gethryn, happily, are still with us today. Gethryn has unravelled no tangle more ingenious than this, his maiden effort. Its colors gleam as brightly now as they shone more than forty years gone, when all life seemed simple and even we graybeards yet were spry.

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THE SUPREME COURT MURDER

by LESLIE FORD

(continued from page 52)

Sergeant Buck burst through the door; Colonel Primrose hobbled to the wall and switched off the light.

He waited a moment until he heard Buck in the garden. He snapped the light on and turned to Mrs. Ellis.

"You're not hurt?" he said quickly.

She shook her head. She was sitting quietly in the chair.

Sergeant Buck appeared in the doorway. The sleeve of his coat was torn and blood trickled slowly down his arm. Mrs. Ellis rose quickly.

"It ain't anything, ma'am," Sergeant Buck said. "He just scratched me. He got over the wall sir. Maybe we could get him in Q Street, if you want."

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Ellis cried quickly. "Please! Let him go—I just shouldn't have come. And I'd better go now."

Colonel Primrose got up. Buck shook his head firmly. "I'll take her, sir."

For a moment Colonel Primrose hesitated. "She'll be safer, sir," Buck added.

Colonel Primrose smiled a little sadly. "Right, Buck," he said.

He stood in the door a moment, watching the sergeant and Hilda Ellis go down the steps and get into the car. Then he went back to his fire and sat there.

Some minutes later the telephone jangled. Colonel Primrose looked up, the same irrational tenseness at his heart, and took up the receiver.

"Brady speaking," said the telephone. "For God's sake, Colonel, what's going on there?"

"What do you mean?" said Colonel Primrose quickly.

"Givler's here," Captain Brady barked, "He's killed Hilda Ellis."

A sinking nausea came over Colonel Primrose. "What did you say?" he shouted, knowing well what Captain Brady had said. "Where was Buck?"

There was a moment's astounded silence.

"Buck?" said Captain Brady.

"He was with her—"

"Colonel, you've lost your mind! She was with you—in your living room."

A great wave of relief flowed over Colonel Primrose.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Well, he

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didn't kill her. But don't tell him. I'll be over."

Mr. Jerome Givler was sitting hunched in a chair in Brady's office. Captain Brady was standing by the window.

Colonel Primrose nodded to him. "Why did you do it?" he asked Givler quietly.

Givler sat there, painful breaths that were almost sobs breaking from his lips.

"Why did you do it?"

"*I lost my head.*" Givler rubbed his forehead with his clenched fists as if trying to clear his brain. "I thought you . . . She's driven me almost crazy—it's one man after another. First Block, then this young fool Herrick, now you."

"But Pomeroy wouldn't let her marry you," Colonel Primrose said quietly.

Givler recoiled as if he had been struck.

"The—!" he said savagely. "He poisoned her mind against me. He couldn't stand to think she'd marry me. He said I was a dwarf. It's always been that way. He poisoned his wife's mind against me!"

Givler crumpled into a heap on Captain Brady's desk, his great shoulders shaken with sobs.

Colonel Primrose broke the silence.

"Did you kill Thomas Pomeroy?"

There was no reply for a moment. Then Givler raised his head. "I wish I had."

Colonel Primrose hesitated, thought a moment, and got up. Captain Brady followed him out of the office.

"He came here to give himself up?"

Brady nodded.

Colonel Primrose thought a moment.

"This is getting complicated," he said. He hesitated. "I don't think I'd hold him. Tell him he didn't hurt anybody, and let him go. Hold his gun and keep a couple of men looking after him."

"All right, Colonel. Your funeral."

Colonel Primrose looked at his watch.

"I'll meet you at the Capitol in half an hour, Brady," he said. "I want to look around there again."

Colonel Primrose smiled pleasantly to himself as he entered the basement door by the law library of the Congress. He nodded to the guard and went up the curving marble staircase. A man was sitting in the marshal's outer office. It was Mr. Tupper, the Supreme Court librarian. He got up as Colonel Primrose came in and shook his head sadly.

"It gets worse and worse, Colonel," he said.

Colonel Primrose stared.

"It does?" he said. "How?"

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"You'd think a murder was enough. But they've taken some of the reports away, and I'm responsible for them."

Colonel Primrose was keenly interested.

"What reports?" he said. "Where?"

"Proceedings of the Court from October 1st to November 15th, 1933."

"You mean they were taken from the Supreme Court chamber on the day of the murder?"

Mr. Tupper nodded ruefully. "From the gallery stairs, Colonel Primrose."

Colonel Primrose thought hard. "What cases did they cover? Is there any connection?"

The librarian shook his head. "The marshal has two men looking the cases up, to see if Mr. Pomeroy was concerned. But, even then, I can't see the least point in taking them. There are other records. What would be the point?"

Colonel Primrose shook his head.

"Were they on the landing, just below the gallery?" he asked. He remembered the guard sitting on a pile of pamphlets.

The librarian nodded.

"Let's have a look."

Mr. Tupper led the way. On the landing he stopped and pointed to the pamphlets stacked on the iron floor.

"We haven't much room to put things in until we move," he said.

Colonel Primrose looked down silently at them. The tops of the stacks were quite dusty, except one; and that, he remembered, was the one on which the guard had been sitting.

"You can see for yourself," said Mr. Tupper. He bent down and touched the center pile. "Somebody has untied them and taken out about twenty of them, and tied the pile up again."

Colonel Primrose looked. "I wonder," he said slowly, "where they are now."

Mr. Tupper stared at him as if he had quite lost what little reason he had ever possessed.

Colonel Primrose continued, "Don't you see that the murderer, who undoubtedly took these, had no use at all for them, except to . . . ? I mean, they certainly are somewhere in the building. Will you get a couple of the messengers and find them?"

The librarian looked at him in silent stupefaction for a moment, then turned and went hastily down the stairs. Colonel Primrose sat down on the remaining pamphlets.

He was still sitting there when Captain Brady came up the iron stairs. Colonel Primrose nodded abstractedly and got up.

"Let's get one or two things straight," he said. "The first point about this job, Brady, is that the man who did it knew the courtroom, knew Pomeroy was open-

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ing the case, knew he had a whole hour to speak in, knew he'd be speaking at 12:45."

"Provided," Captain Brady said, "that it was Pomeroy he meant to kill."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I think you can count on that. Now, here we come to the hardest part of all: he knew enough about how things go on around here to come up into this gallery and fix up a deadly device without being noticed. That's on the verge of the impossible, Brady."

Captain Brady nodded glumly.

"Because," Colonel Primrose went on methodically, "this chamber is locked and double-locked until nine o'clock in the morning. After that everyone connected with the Court can come in. I'm not talking about their being able to fix up that revolver, but just about their being around here. Now, whom does that include?"

"The justices," said Brady sardonically.

Colonel Primrose nodded. "The marshal, the deputy marshal, the librarian, the secretaries, the stenographers, the Attorney General's staff, the messengers, and the pages. That's the lot. We start off looking for somebody who's familiar with this Court; and we add that he's familiar with this Court and that he's familiar with firearms and mechanics. Now, if you were fixing up a revolver in that way, what would you have to bring into this gallery?"

"A gun," said Brady. "A coil, a dry cell, some wire, a weight, and a pair of pliers."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "What would you bring them in?"

Brady stared suddenly. "By gosh, Colonel, you've got it! A brief case, of course!"

Colonel Primrose nodded again.

"That could do it," he said. "In a place like this what would be less noticed? Everyone carries one. Now, let's say it was a brief case. Suppose you'd been up here for an hour—and how you could do it I can't tell you to save my life, but suppose you had—and you didn't want anyone to realize it when you came down. What would you do?"

Brady stared at him for a moment. Then he said, "I'd carry something out that made it seem as if I'd come up for it."

Colonel Primrose pointed to the stack of pamphlets.

"Fifteen or so of these documents are missing," he said. "The murderer fixed his trap here, tucked the Court records from October 1st to November 15th, 1933 under his arm, taking the intelligent pains to get them from the middle so there'd still be dust left on top, and calmly walked out with them. And nobody noticed him at all."

Brady chewed his cigar. "Narrows it down, Colonel."

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Colonel Primrose looked soberly at him. "Does it, or doesn't it?" he said. "Well, what you've got to do is this: take everybody around this place, find out if they know anything about electricity and mechanics, get their pictures, and take them around to every electrical shop in Washington. And what about the gun?"

"It's an old Army type Thousands of 'em around."

"What about Givler's gun?"

"He bought it this afternoon, to protect himself from his enemies—or that's his story. He ought to know plenty about guns, Colonel. He's a member of the Westchester Trapshooters Association."

Colonel Primrose looked up at him. "He is?" he said. He was a little puzzled. "He missed that girl at fifteen feet."

"I guess his nerves were all shot."

Colonel Primrose sat down on the pile of pamphlets and was silent for a moment.

"Well, let's get along," he said.

At the foot of the stairs they met the marshal coming out of his anteroom.

"Ah," Colonel Primrose said. "Can you let us into the chamber for a moment?"

In the Supreme Court room he wandered off by himself toward the gallery, behind the justices' bench. He was vaguely disturbed, as people are when something lies at the back of their heads, refusing to take shape and clarify itself.

It was shortly after nine the next morning that Sergeant Buck presented himself in the library doorway. He cleared his throat nervously and Colonel Primrose shot him an irritated glance. Then he put down his pen.

"Well, Buck!" he said. "A wedding, or a White House reception?"

Sergeant Buck's granite face flushed sheepishly. He smoothed down his best suit and brushed a highly imaginary speck form the band of his dove-gray hat. He cleared his throat again.

"If it's all right with you, sir," he said formally, "I'd thought I'd shoffer Mrs. Ellis around this morning, in case that guy starts shooting again. I mean, she's got to go to a couple of places this morning, and if you wasn't using the car, and it was all right with you, I just thought, if it was all right . . ."

"It is," said Colonel Primrose. "Be careful, Buck."

Sergeant Buck's face flushed still more deeply. "I don't know what you're driving at, sir."

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "I mean, be careful somebody doesn't take another shot at you."

He turned back to his work, smiling a little as he thought how much he would like to see Hilda

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Ellis' face when she saw Sergeant Buck in his best suit.

It was shortly after eleven when he got out of a taxi at the Ritz. On the sixth floor he knocked at the door of the Pomeroys' suite. Sterrett Conrad opened the door.

"Come in, sir," he said.

Anne Pomeroy was sitting curled up at an end of the sofa. She smiled at him and got up. "Hello," she said. "Sterrett, you'd better come back later."

Mr. Conrad looked from one to the other. There was a little air of possessive arrogance about him.

"Okay," Conrad said.

Colonel Primrose sat down.

"What's happened about my father?" she said quietly.

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "We're making some progress, Miss Pomeroy. It's slow work."

"You know, I've been trying so hard to think of anything that might help you."

"What about Mr. Givler and your father?"

She shook her head. "That's out. Jerome Givler couldn't possibly have had anything to do with it. You see, Dad himself used to say Jerome was the brains of the firm."

Colonel Primrose wondered if she realized, as apparently she did not, how little "out" that seemed to make Mr. Givler.

"Dad was the contact man. You'd be surprised to hear that Mr. Givler always did the criminal pleading, too. Dad used to say that if it hadn't been for his legs—they're terribly short—he could have been the greatest actor of the day. It's really incredible to see how juries do just anything he wants them to do."

"He never married?"

"No. I guess there was some sort of tragedy. I think he was in love with Mother."

"What about Mrs. Ellis?"

Anne Pomeroy looked away quickly.

"Oh, she's marvelous, isn't she? Men always fall for her like—" She looked up at him quickly. "Oh, I'm not jealous—at least, not very."

"You shouldn't be," Colonel Primrose said gently.

"Oh, I know. I'm being perfectly horrid. And she's swell. Do you know what she did?"

"What?"

"You know, she hasn't any money except what she makes. Well, Mr. Givler told us about Dad's will, and he'd left her ten thousand dollars."

"Oh?" said Colonel Primrose. "She didn't tell me that."

"No, because she won't take it."

Colonel Primrose, who was very practical in such matters, would have put Hilda Ellis down as more practical still, and was very much surprised. "Why not?"

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"That's what I wanted to know. She said it was a matter of principle. Dad wouldn't lend her money when she needed it badly, and now when she doesn't need it she won't take it. And she won't marry Mr. Givler, and he's got pots of money."

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"Do you know, Miss Pomeroy," he said, "whether there was any serious disagreement between your father and Mr. Herrick on Sunday evening?"

She nodded. "That was my fault."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"Oh, it's not anything, really. Only . . . I was a jealous little fool. You see, John was at our place in Connecticut this summer, and I thought he was swell, and I got Father to bring me down with him this time, because, well . . . John's been writing to me, and—oh, well, you see what I mean. Anyway, I was all wet, and when we got off the train and I introduced him to Hilda, he said, 'Not *the* Hilda Ellis!' and he didn't even *see* me. Then Hilda wasn't staying here, not until yesterday, and John just took charge of her. He was showing Hilda the town."

She tried to smile, without much luck. "And Dad found it out, because I was blubbering like an idiot."

Colonel Primrose watched her pleat and unpleat a handkerchief.

"It's funny how things work out, isn't it?" she said suddenly. "I never thought I'd marry Sterrett Conrad."

Colonel Primrose looked at her for a long time. "You're not going to marry Conrad," he said. "And you don't think, for a moment, that your cousin is really interested in John Herrick. She's not."

She shook her head. "You don't understand, Colonel Primrose," she said wistfully. "You see, Dad lost his head and practically told him he had to marry me to get in the firm. So of course John got mad and refused. He had to."

She turned her head to hide the quick, hot tears. "Oh, I wish Dad was here!" she cried suddenly, and crumpled into a wretched little heap at the end of the sofa.

Colonel Primrose hesitated a moment, then wandered over to the window and looked down on 16th Street. A bright pearl-gray hat was getting out of a familiar car. He waited for Buck to open the door and for Hilda Ellis to step out.

"There's no reason why I should stay in Washington, is there, Colonel Primrose?"

He turned. Anne Pomeroy was sitting up, the damage of a storm of tears repaired.

"None that I know of," he said. "I'll ask Captain Brady."

"I'd like to get back to New

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York. So much has happened. I think I almost wish we'd caught that plane that crashed."

"How did you miss it?" Colonel Primrose inquired casually.

"Oh, just an accident. Hilda got caught in a traffic jam on 42nd Street, and the time she took to get to a phone and tell us not to wait was just enough to save all three of us, as it turned out."

"Did Mr. Givler plan to come with you?"

"No. He won't fly. He thinks it's dangerous."

The door of the side bedroom opened and Hilda Ellis came in, smiling. "Guess whom I saw sitting downstairs as if he didn't have a thing in the world to do?"

Colonel Primrose caught the quickening light in Anne's face, and saw it fade when Mrs. Ellis said, "Sterrett Conrad. He said he was waiting for Colonel Primrose to go, so he could see you again."

She smiled at Anne. "You ought to be nicer to him, darling. The breed's scarcer every year, from what I hear."

"Colonel Primrose says he thinks it'll be all right for us to go, Hilda," Anne said.

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I'll see Brady and phone you."

"He was here this morning," Mrs. Ellis said. "He asked us questions for an hour. Colonel, your Sergeant Buck has been wonderful. You don't want to sell him, do you? He's priceless."

"He *is* priceless," said Colonel Primrose. "No, Buck's more likely to be selling me some day."

He got up. "Thank you, Miss Pomeroy, for our talk. If you can leave here, when would you like to go?"

"Tomorrow."

"What train?"

"Oh, we'll fly, won't we Hilda?"

"I'd rather, of course. There's a plane at noon from the Thompson Airdrome in Bladensburg."

As Colonel Primrose reached the door it opened, and John Herrick stood there. "Hello!" he said. Anne got up quickly.

"If you'll wait, Colonel Primrose, I'll go down with you. Sterrett's waiting in the lobby for me."

She ran into her bedroom.

Mrs. Ellis got quickly to her feet and picked up her gloves. "You wait here, John," she said coolly. "I'm going with Colonel Primrose myself."

Outside in the hall she smiled at him. "I can't bear for that child to think I want her John," she said. "Do you mind?"

"Oh, not at all," Colonel Primrose said. "How about some lunch?"

"Elegant."

"Has Givler given you an ex-

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planation of his rather unusual conduct last night?" Colonel Primrose asked when the waiter had disappeared with their order.

She nodded. "He's very contrite, and he's going to reimburse you handsomely for any damage he did." She paused. "He's a curious man."

Colonel Primrose looked across the table into her dark eyes. The laughter had gone out of them. He saw a different woman behind them, keenly alive and shrewd.

"I understood him to say yesterday that when he left you at the Capitol on Sunday he wanted you to hear him opening the case?"

She nodded. "You see, he wasn't invited to the party, Sunday afternoon, but they let him in with Uncle and me. He stayed until it was almost over and then left. He didn't want to do the 'tour.' He's morbidly sensitive about walking around with people."

Colonel Primrose listened intently.

"Have you any idea why Pomeroy didn't let him open the case?"

She shook her head. "Except that Uncle always argued that sort of case. Givler's theatrical. That doesn't go in the Supreme Court."

Colonel Primrose smiled a little. "You know," he said, "as far as I can make out, the only other person who knew positively that Pomeroy was going to open was—John Herrick."

Mrs. Ellis was silent for a moment. She shook her head. "That's perfectly inconceivable, Colonel Primrose."

"It would certainly appear so," Colonel Primrose admitted cheerfully. "Well, what about Givler, then? Do you think he had any hand in Pomeroy's death?"

Mrs. Ellis stirred her coffee. Finally she shook her head. "I don't think so."

There was a little silence. Mrs. Ellis said, "You won't forget to find out from Captain Brady if we can go back?"

"I won't," said Colonel Primrose. "You'll fly up in the morning?"

"If my throat isn't worse. I've been gargling all day to catch it before it gets me down."

After he had put Mrs. Ellis on the elevator Colonel Primrose went to a telephone booth, put in a call for Captain Brady, and made his request about Mrs. Ellis and Anne Pomeroy.

Captain Brady's voice came shockingly clear over the wire. Colonel Primrose listened calmly to at least thirty seconds of violent profanity.

"*Yes!*" said Captain Brady. "Listen, Colonel! You're the fourth person that's called me up in the last hour to ask that! Herrick, Conrad, and Givler. They can go whenever they feel like

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it! *It's okay with me!*"

"That's dandy," said Colonel Primrose. "I take it they really want to go."

Captain Brady's reply was unprintable.

"How are things going?"

"Rotten. They've found those pamphlets, though. Stacked in a pile in the basement. Coming over?"

"Right away, Brady. And maybe I'll tell you how Pomeroy was killed."

"That'll be great," said Captain Brady ironically. "Oh, wait a minute, Colonel. There's a call here from the Post Office. Anderson wants to see you. Army and Navy Club at two."

"Thanks," Colonel Primrose said. He pulled his watch out of his pocket. It was nearly quarter to two. Colonel Primrose got his overcoat and went out into 16th Street. Sergeant Buck stepped up.

"The car's here, sir."

"Good," said Colonel Primrose. "I wondered if you'd get back by this time."

Sergeant Buck had changed to his less striking raiment of gray tweeds.

"Let's go round to the club. Did you have a good time this morning?"

Sergeant Buck started the engine. "Yes, sir. I took her all over. Down on Pennsylvania Avenue to a Chinese place to get a present, and lots of other places. She got a thing she called a 'vawz' but it looked like a vase to me, sir. Wasn't big enough to hold anything, as I told her, but she just laughed. She's a mighty nice lady."

Buck's mahogany face corrugated with thought.

"If a man ever *was* to marry," he said tentatively, "that's the kind of a lady that wouldn't be no trouble in the house."

"You suggested that to her, Buck?"

"Not in them words." Sergeant Buck narrowly missed a taxi. "No, I just said you never married because you never found the right girl."

"*Me*?" said Colonel Primrose. He cocked his head and glared.

Sergeant Buck stared back in bewilderment. "Who else did you think, sir?" He jumped out to open the door.

Colonel Primrose went on into the club, found his friend, R. M. Anderson, postal inspector, in a corner of the bar, ordered two Scotch-and-sodas, and sat down by him. He felt rather like a balloon with the air sharply let out of it.

Anderson looked at him curiously. "I didn't want to call you, Colonel," he said. "But it seems you left word you wanted to hear about it as soon as the examination was finished."

"I did," said Colonel Primrose.

Anderson glanced around him.

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"Following your report," he said quietly, "we continued investigation. You were right. There's no doubt the plane was blown up from the inside by an explosive in the mail compartment."

Colonel Primrose's black eyes shone.

"What are you doing?" he said.

"We're keeping it quiet. We're looking for a man known to have had a grudge against Gearing, the pilot. This fellow was fired, and Gearing got his job."

Colonel Primrose nodded abstractedly.

"I think you're wasting your time," he said after a moment.

Mr. Anderson finished his drink.

"So long."

Colonel Primrose did not answer. He sat in his chair staring for some minutes directly through a variety of very intimate friends who went by. It was nearly half-past three o'clock when he came to with a start and realized where he was. He scrambled hastily to his feet.

The hands of the gallery clock in the Supreme Court chamber stood at 4:30. The marshal struck the gavel down on his desk, the Court rose. Nine black-robed justices filed impressively out. The room emptied rapidly.

Captain Brady and Colonel Primrose came in the main entrance. They were talking earnestly. Behind them and above was Sergeant Buck's grim face.

"I can't tell you all of it till I'm absolutely certain," Colonel Primrose was saying. "But these are the facts: the shooting of Pomeroy was the *second* attempt at his life. I *know* that to be true."

He stopped at the expression on Captain Brady's face.

"Now, Colonel!" Brady said. "I'm not that dumb. You thiink I don't know what you went up to New Jersey for, Thursday, or how you just happened to be in the Supreme Court here Monday morning? Why, you hadn't been in the Supreme Court for thirty years!"

Colonel Primrose's black old eyes sparkled. "Score one for you, Brady," he said. "Listen. That plane was blown up. It wasn't done to kill any pilot. It was done to kill Thomas Pomeroy. When it failed, this business here was set off. Mrs. Ellis got held up in a traffic jam, and was late calling up and telling them not to wait for her. They missed the plane, too. If Pomeroy had gone down in the plane . . ."

"Colonel," said Brady doggedly, "This doesn't make *sense*. Mrs. Ellis was in that plane too, as far as he knew. He didn't want to kill her. Look at the way he went to pieces last night, when he thought he'd done it."

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Colonel Primrose continued to look down. He shook his head a little.

"You don't understand," he said. "We'll skip the business of Mrs. Ellis being on the plane, for the time being, and even the fact that General Block, whose help Mrs. Ellis had accepted after she'd turned Givler down, was on there too. Let's consider the rest of it. For instance, the shot he fired from my garden. Brady, that man's a trapshooter. He couldn't have missed at that distance."

Captain Brady stared. "But why, in heaven's name, Colonel?"

"Wait a minute. Let me point out to you the case against Jerome Givler. Givler tells one or two people that he was opening the case. Say that was nonsense. Mrs. Ellis told me that Pomeroy *always* argued such cases—Givler's forte was jury pleading. All right. Givler failed in his plot to kill Pomeroy by bombing the mail plane he was going to travel on. He then comes down here and rigs up his murder device in that gallery over your head. I'll tell you in a minute how that was really done.

"He then comes out and fires a revolver through my window never planning to hit anybody. He goes to your office and gives himself up, with a cock-and-bull story of having killed Mrs. Ellis—*whom he doesn't really care about.* What are we going to say about that? We're going to say just exactly what we did say. This couldn't be the man who rigged up that murder trap in the gallery. It isn't his temperament. He's a wild man, and so morbidly jealous of Hilda Ellis that he'll kill her just to see nobody else gets her.

"So, we're going to think just exactly what he wants us to think: that he did try to kill Mrs. Ellis, and that consequently he's certainly not the man who killed Thomas Pomeroy."

Captain Brady shook his head. "Listen, Colonel. I've questioned every living soul who was here Monday morning. I tell you that if Givler or anybody else tried to put that gun up there, he'd have been caught red-handed."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "You're right, as far as you go," he said simply. "You remember yesterday when we were here I said that to have fiixed that gun up Monday morning, when everybody was about, verged on the impossible. *It was impossible.* It simply could not have been done. And the attaching of the gun to the clock had to be done after 12:45 at night. What does that leave us?"

Colonel Primrose smiled a little at the expression on Captain Brady's face.

"I'm not crazy," he said. "Look here. Sunday afternoon the Women's Defense League met under

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the dome to hand out tea and medals, and to make a tour of the Capitol. They visited the House, the Supreme Court, the Senate, the whole works. Pomeroy was here—Givler was not invited, but he was here just the same. And Givler left early."

"You don't mean—" Brady began.

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"I do mean," he said soberly. "And it's the only conceivable way it could have been done. The murderer came in here with that crowd of people on the tour of the Capitol. The murderer calmly waited until they were about to go, and stayed here. Stayed here behind those hangings, or behind the screen there, until they'd locked the doors. Stayed here, Brady, until 12:45 Monday morning. And then the murderer went up to the gallery, with all night to work in—and fixed up the revolver, the wires, and the weight."

"What about the knowledge of mechanics?"

Colonel Primrose looked curiously at him.

"It didn't take any very complicated knowledge of mechanics, for one thing. Any schoolboy could have done it. But let's go on. The murderer waits until morning—and the court attendants begin to roam about in here. Then it's easy to step out, with those pamphlets picked up from the gallery landing, and just walk out of the chamber."

It was at that moment that the messenger appeared in the marshal's door.

"Telephone, sir," he said to Brady. "Mr. Hansen."

"He's the guy I've got watching Givler," Brady said. He strode through the door into the marshal's office. Colonel Primrose and Buck followed. Brady put down the phone without having said a word.

"Lost him twenty minutes ago," he said.

"Let's get over to the Ritz," Colonel Primrose said.

Colonel Primrose stepped out of the elevator and ran as fast as his knee allowed to the door of the Pomeroy suite. The door was ajar and the room empty. He went quickly across to the bedroom door. A maid was making the bed.

"Where's Mrs. Ellis?" he said.

The maid stared stupidly. "You mean the lady that was here? She's gone."

He turned back to Captain Brady. "Call the desk," he said curtly. "Find out when they left and where they've gone."

He went into the bathroom. The maid had flung the used towels in a heap by the door. A little pile of debris was swept up beside them: a cardboard box that a tube of tooth paste had

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come in, a drug-store carton of potassium chlorate, with typed directions to gargle twice daily.

Colonel Primrose turned without a word and went back.

Brady put down the phone. "They checked out half an hour ago," he said. "They got tickets on the five o'clock plane from Bladensburg."

Colonel Primrose reached for the telephone with his left hand and for his watch with his right. A bell somewhere struck five.

"Connect me with the Thompson Airdrome, Bladensburg," he said. "Hurry, please! This is a matter of life or death."

Sergeant Buck spoke crisply, his hand on the door. "Shall I get the car, sir?"

"No. Get on another phone and get a police car. Hello!"

"Thompson Airdrome—good evening."

Behind and beyond the young woman's voice speaking to him Colonel Primrose could hear the roar of a plane.

"*Stop the five o'clock plane!*" he said. His voice was cold with command and urgency. "*Police Department speaking!*"

The languid voice changed instantly, "Sorry—it's just taken off."

"Order it back. *It's got to be stopped! This is a matter of life or death!*"

"Right. I'll get in touch at once."

The phone clicked. Colonel Primrose put down the receiver. Brady appeared in the door. "The car'll be here in two minutes, Colonel," he said.

Colonel Primrose started toward the door. He came back quickly and took up the receiver.

"Thompson Airdrome again," he said. "Quick! . . . Hello! Thompson Airdrome? Police Department speaking. Have your fastest plane ready to take off."

He turned to Brady.

"The radio will be disconnected," he said. "Hurry up, man."

Colonel Primrose will never forget that ride through the streets of Washington, swarming with the hordes of government employees on their way home from work, or the speed and precision of the traffic police clearing the way as the black car hurtled along the empty gray ribbon between crowds, the siren screaming. The speedometer reached 60 as they came out of Mount Vernon Place into New York Avenue, and 80 as they tore through the red light on Florida Avenue and onto the Viaduct. And always the radio on the dashboard sounded its even note of warning:

"Calling all cars. Calling all cars. Clear all traffic New York Avenue, Maryland Avenue, to Thompson Avenue."

They turned into Maryland Avenue at 70 miles an hour and

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went under the bridge at 90; past orange stalls into Cottage City. As they came to a great white cross where the road turned, the speedometer stood at 97.

"Calling all cars. Calling all cars. Resume normal traffic."

They turned into the airfield and came to a grinding stop ten feet from a small plane with engine roaring. It was an army pursuit plane, two-seater, open cockpit. The pilot in it waved a hand and shouted something no one could hear. From somewhere Colonel Primrose could hear a woman screaming at him as he clambered up behind the pilot. He caught the word "Radio," but he had known that the radio would not work. The plane moved slowly, then faster, then hurtled along the grass and rose with a long zooming flow into the air.

Colonel Primrose fastened the belt around him and took up the charting board at his feet. He turned it to the blackboard side, took the piece of white chalk from the holder between the boards, and printed in as large letters as he could:

DUMP THE MAIL! QUICK! POLICE!!!

He held it on his lap and shouted at the pilot, "How fast can we go?"

The pilot turned and grinned.

"Two-twenty-five!" he roared back. "They're making a hundred and fifty."

Colonel Primrose sat quietly. He closed his eyes. "Save her!" he said. "God help me to save her!"

The minutes dragged. The needle on the dashboard moved steadily up: 200; 215. The needle found its mark: 225.

The pilot turned. "Twenty minutes more!" he roared.

Colonel Primrose closed his eyes again. He had waited for the zero hour before, with Sergeant Buck not far away; but never at a time of more wanton slaughter than now. Anne Pomeroy's face kept coming before him . . . and Hilda Ellis'. They were flying peacefully, having tea possibly, or reading, never dreaming that suddenly, and at what time Colonel Primrose did not know, death would suddenly burst on them and their plane would go hurtling, shattered, a living spear of fire, down toward the earth.

The pilot shouted something. Colonel Primrose opened his eyes. Somewhere ahead of him was a tiny red glow on a tiny dark spot; and while he drew a deep, bursting breath they gained on it. Faster.

Colonel Primrose grasped his board firmly. The tiny plane roared. They were close now, and in an instant they had come up, alongside, twenty feet distant. Colonel Primrose waved one hand, as he held up his board

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and shouted, knowing well that in the roar of those great engines forty men could have shouted unheard. Then they were past, far into space, banking.

Colonel Primrose's pilot turned back. "She's slowing up!" he roared. A wave of relief so great that it was almost nauseating swept over Colonel Primrose. They were coming together again.

"Dump the mail!" Colonel Primrose shouted. Then he remembered and raised his blackboard, waving his hand.

He could see the staring face of the pilot now. His plane sheered off, turned, banked; and shouted with joy. The mail plane was slowly turning, circling back toward them.

As he looked, peering into the growing dusk, his heart a cold, leaden weight, the last scene in the grisly tragedy of murder in the Thomas Pomeroy family took place. His eyes were on the plane banking, circling—cruelly slow—back toward them.

As he gazed, praying desperately that her pilot would understand before it was too late, a dark hole appeared sharply in the silver surface of the other plane. The door of the after compartment had opened. A figure which Colonel Primrose could hardly see stood there for an instant, coolly poised, then leaped out and plunged down toward the earth.

Colonel Primrose stared, fascinated and helpless, down at the dark figure on its mad, hurtling rush toward the ground. As he did so, a tiny white cloud suddenly appeared above it and spread slowly out into a glistening white circle. The hurtling rush stopped. Colonel Primrose knew that he was looking down on a parachute, and that under it, shielded from his sight, the murderer of Thomas Pomeroy was gliding safely to the ground.

The two planes, the great silver passenger ship and the tiny dragonfly pursuit plane, were side by side again. Colonel Primrose held out his message, shouting, gesticulating. The pilot waved his hand. Colonel Primrose saw the great passenger ship lurch and the shining bottom of the nose fall open. Two striped mailbags plunged out and shot down into space.

Colonel Primrose put the charting board carefully down, leaned back for an instant, and wiped the freezing sweat from his forehead. He leaned over and peered down again. He spotted the white cloud of the parachute, sailing lazily down.

Suddenly he gripped the cockpit and leaned hastily out. It had just come to his mind, intent before on getting the mailbags out before this plane met the same fate as the other one, that the great plane had circled far back after the

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parachute jumper had left it. He peered down through the beginning dusk. Near the white cloud, almost directly over it, two black specks, revolving, plunged steadily downward; and then, while he stared fascinated, one of the black specks disappeared.

Far down in space, where it had been an instant before, he could see the flash of the explosion that had torn the mailbag to invisible bits At the same instant the delicate, floating white cloud of the parachute, torn and shredded by flying fragments from the detonation, streamed up toward him in a thin, useless line. And Hilda Ellis hurtled down, with increasing and relentless speed, to destruction.

Captain Brady and Sergeant Buck stood looking into the fire. John Herrick, sitting on the sofa, looked silently down at the floor. Colonel Primrose, wrapped in a llama-wool bathrobe, sipped a hot toddy in front of the fire in his library.

"But you said it was Givler!" Brady said.

Colonel Primrose shook his head.

"No," he said. *"You* said it was Givler. I thought it might be Hilda Ellis from the first—or almost. Then I became pretty certain it was she, and when we went to the hotel I knew it was. She was too much in the picture from the beginning. The delay in New York, for instance, so that she couldn't possibly have caught the plane, while Pomeroy and Anne missed it by the skin of their teeth. I wondered about that the first time I heard it.

"Then everything fitted in. The familiarity with the Supreme Court, for instance. She'd not only been there with Herrick constantly for three days, but she'd spent hours—centuries, she said—sitting in the chamber listening to her father, no doubt staring up at that gallery clock. Then the knowledge of electricity and mechanics, the nerve and daring—she had all that. Givler didn't have it. No one else in the picture had. The knowledge, too, that Givler would never in the world open such a case, and wasn't going to. She even told me that herself.

"Then the other points. Why was the murder committed in the Supreme Court? Simply because everything pointed to somebody who had a vast familiarity with the Court and was well known there—as I thought for a while, myself; and Hilda Ellis had no slightest connection with it. I suddenly realized that that could be the answer there, before I'd met her.

"And the pamphlets, too. The murderer carried them out, not because she was well known there, but because she wasn't known at

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all. Yet her face was vaguely familiar, at least, to nearly everybody. Hence, with the pamphlets, nearly everyone was likely just to think she was somebody else's secretary that he'd seen dozens of times.

"Well, I gave you a true account, Brady, of how it was done—only, it was Mrs. Ellis who dropped out of the tour of the Capitol and stayed in the Supreme Court room, and not Givler. She waited in the chamber until it was locked up. She had the necessary stuff in her handbag. She carries an unusually large one. A woman's bag is even less noticeable than a lawyer's brief case. No one missed her that night because she was staying alone in a hotel. She didn't move to the Ritz until the next day."

Captain Brady shook his head. "I still don't see how you got onto it, Colonel."

Colonel Primrose did not answer for some time. "It was all these points together," he said *then*. "And Buck's gallantry helped."

He cocked his head and smiled up at the stiff-backed figure standing at attention against the hall door. Sergeant Buck's face turned red.

"Buck told me he'd taken her, among other places, to one of those Oriental bazaars down on Pennsylvania Avenue. She bought a small vase as a gift for someone. I wondered at the time about that, having it already in my mind that Mrs. Ellis had been doing some queer things. That seemed a very strange thing to do. It's not the sort of gift you'd think she'd get for anybody, and she was just going to New York, where they have very elaborate shops. Well, there's always one thing you can do with that sort of vase, and that's what she wanted it for.

"When I saw the rooms she had just left, when she'd got Anne Pomeroy to take an earlier plane so they wouldn't be stopped, I knew it was a matter of life or death to stop that plane. On the floor was an empty packet of potassium chlorate. It had directions on it for use as a gargle. She'd told me she had a sore throat, and that was another point, for I remembered thinking at the time how well she looked. At that time, also, for some reason or another, it flashed into my mind that I'd heard her say, the first time I saw her, that she was the only child of Pomeroy's only brother.

"Potassium chlorate isn't used much as a gargle nowadays, though you can buy it at any drugstore. But if you powder it up and mix it with a little powdered sulphur, or some red phosphorus, you've got a mighty dangerous explosive; and if you then pack your mixture gently in a good, stout vase, put a

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resistance wire through it, plug the vase with a wooden plug, connect up the wire with a cell and a clock so that the hands complete a circuit when you want it . . ."

Colonel Primrose sipped his toddy.

"It was all neat and simple. All she had to do was wrap it up and mail it at three o'clock marked for the five o'clock plane. There wasn't a chance in the world of anything going wrong. Then all she had to do was get on the plane with those other doomed passengers and wait. At the right time she went to the washroom, put on the parachute she'd brought in her overnight bag, and just jumped out.

"When the plane crashed, she could simply say she'd warned the pilot that the engines were missing, or something of the sort. What could anybody prove to the contrary? And for a woman of her training to throw the radio off was child's play. I've no doubt she went into the cockpit, as one flyer to another, and simply slipped one hand under the dash and disconnected a terminal. It wouldn't be noticed immediately."

John Herrick got up suddenly. "But why did she do it?"

"She did it for eight hundred thousand dollars, free of encumbrance," said Colonel Primrose. "If Thomas and Anne Pomeroy died, Mrs. Ellis was next in line to inherit."

"But she'd refused ten thousand!"

"She could well afford to. Ten thousand was nothing to what she was playing for. But that was a very bad mistake. That was one of the chief things I wondered about. She needed money badly for her Tokyo flight. Several people told me that General Block was backing her, but I fancy she was the one who told them that. According to Mrs. Pettijohn, Block was more interested in women than in women flyers. Anyway, Block was dead—I imagine it was accidental; he just happened to be on that plane.

"So I couldn't see any good reason for Mrs. Ellis' not taking that ten thousand—except as a blind.

"Well, that's it," he said. "When she jumped, the plane was circling back to see what it was all about, and they cut it mighty fine as far as dumping the mail was concerned. When they finally got the idea and did dump it, the mail went down faster than *she* was going, of course, with that parachute.

"The plane had circled back somewhere above her, and the bomb just went off too close. They found a little jagged bit of the vase caught in the parachute, and other bits must have gone through it. You know, only one rent in a parachute is plenty. The air just rips it open."

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Sergeant Buck shook his head.

"That's fate, sir," he said solemnly.

Captain Brady shook his head too. "But what about Givler?"

"Givler?" Colonel Primrose said. "Givler hated Pomeroy, and he was—is—madly in love with Hilda Ellis. When he shot at her, he really wanted to kill her rather than see her in love with another man. And he missed, probably, because of nerves. He was just about insane with jealousy."

Captain Brady got up, put on his overcoat, and took his hat. "Well," he said gruffly, "it all goes to show you never can tell. Colonel, this is another one up for you."

As Sergeant Buck went out into the hall with him the telephone rang. Colonel Primrose took down the receiver.

"Hello," he said. "Yes, Colonel Primrose speaking. Oh, hello! You got through all right? . . . Sorry it had to happen that way. I hope it wasn't too big a shock. Yes, certainly I'll give him a message—but why don't you give it to him yourself? He's right here."

He handed the receiver to John Herrick.

Colonel Primrose watched his face with a little twinkle.

"Oh, Anne!" he said. "Darling! Where are you? Anne, can you—will you forgive me? I love you! I . . . What? Yes! Yes! Anne, wait a minute—make it Philadelphia, it's closer! Goodbye, darling!"

Colonel Primrose sat back in his chair, Sergeant Buck came in.

"Somebody left the front door open," he said.

"That was Herrick," Colonel Primrose said. "I fancy he was in a hurry."

"I was just telling Judge Adams next door about Pomeroy," Sergeant Buck remarked. "All he said was, he guessed it wouldn't be the first time they'd got away with murder in the Supreme Court."

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a NEW Double-C story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Here is the 15th in the series about Rand, the Double-C man—and note a new development. Rand, as you know, is an expert in deciphering codes and decoding ciphers—a kind of "pure" detective work. It was inevitable that Rand, while not forsaking his specialty of unraveling secret communications, should let his talents spread and take wing. In this 15th case he is more of a detective investigating a murder than he is the Double-C man—although he still remains that, inventively and ingeniously, especially in this bizarre case of the 24 clocks, with its Carr-Chesterton-Queenian overtones. But don't be surprised if in Rand's next case he emerges as a full-fledged detective, detecting mysteries not restricted to secret messages. Rand not only rides again, he rises! . . .

THE SPY AND THE BERMUDA CIPHER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

RAND WAS AWAKENED AT FOUR in the morning by a dishevelled Frank Malley, who stood above his cot like some dark angel of judgment. "Telephone, Rand. It's Inspector Stephens of Scotland Yard. He says he has to talk with you and nobody else."

Rand groaned and rolled over. "In the middle of the night?" He'd known Stephens casually for years, but the man had never phoned him in the dead of night.

Rand roused himself with a sigh and felt his way across the darkened office to the telephone, then waited while the call was switched to his line. Outside, fog was rising from the Thames, obscuring even the timeless face of Big Ben across the river.

"Hello?"

"Rand?"

"Yes." He recognized the

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familiar harshness of the Inspector's voice. "What is it, Stephens?"

"I tried to reach you at your flat."

"I've been sleeping in the office this week. Busy time. What's so urgent?"

"A mess, Rand. You'd better come down."

"Down where? What is it?"

"We have a dead man here. He may be Jimmy King from your Department."

"My God!" Rand steadied himself against the desk, wide-awake now. "How did it happen?"

"It would be better if you saw for yourself. I can have a car pick you up in five minutes."

"Very well." He hung up and dressed quickly. Then he hurried down to the central decoding room where Malley and the others were working through the night. "How's it going?" he asked.

Malley shrugged. He was a big Irishman who liked his work. "Nothing yet. We're trying some transpositions now."

Rand glanced up at the blackboards with their solid rows of meaningless letters. "What time did King go off duty?"

"A little before midnight, I think. What's wrong?"

"I'll tell you later," Rand said. He went downstairs to wait for the police car.

The ride through the dim, nearly deserted city was something of a nightmare. They followed the river east toward Greenwich, and here the fog was thickest, obscuring even the outline of the road ahead.

"What's the trouble?" Rand asked the uniformed driver. "What happened?"

"I wouldn't know, sir."

"Was it an automobile accident?"

"I don't think so, sir."

Finally they stopped behind two other police cars at a dark blur of a house, almost hidden from the road by a small forest of brambles and bushes. Rand knew they were somewhere in Greenwich, and the sound of groaning foghorns told him the river was not far away.

He followed a constable up the steps and into a dimly lit hallway. They walked down it to the very last door, where a group of silent men stood waiting in front of it. Rand recognized Stephens at once and shook his hand. "Sorry to get you here like this, Rand."

"That's all right, Inspector."

Stephens reached out a gloved hand and pushed open the door. Jimmy King's body was crumpled near the center of the room, his dead eyes staring at the ceiling. There was a bloody wound in his left side, near the heart. But as Rand's eyes left the body they took in the room itself, and he felt his breathing quicken. The room was lined with bookcases

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that held a large assortment of encyclopedias and atlases and leather-bound textbooks. And on top of the bookcases, spaced evenly around the room some six feet above the floor, were 24 clocks.

"Clocks?" Rand asked.

The Scotland Yard man nodded glumly. "It looks as if his time ran out."

Hastings was at his desk in Security by nine o'clock, eyeing Rand distastefully across a desk already littered with the raw materials of a day's work. "What is this business with King?" he asked. "He was one of your people, wasn't he?"

Rand nodded. King had joined the Department of Concealed Communications two years earlier, when he was fresh out of college. He was bright and quick to learn, and had proved especially good with transposition ciphers.

"What was he working on?" Hastings wanted to know.

"The same thing as everyone else in Double-C, The Bermuda Cipher."

"You haven't cracked that one yet?"

Rand shook his head. "Day and night for a week. I've even been sleeping in the office." The Bermuda Cipher had been picked up ten days earlier by a joint U.S.-British listening post near the Russian border. It was a long message, apparently destined for certain Russian agents operating in the London area. The first word of the message, in Russian plaintext, had been *Bermuda*. It was followed by 346 letter-groups of five characters each. They had been sent over standard teletype lines from Moscow to Paris, then hand-delivered to someone in London. It was not the first such message. A previous one, from London to Moscow, had been headed with the Russian word for *Hong Kong*. They'd had no luck deciphering that one, either.

"All right," Hastings said, "he was working on the Bermuda Cipher. Anything else? Anything that might have taken him to that house in Greenwich?"

"Nothing," Rand told him. "What have you learned about the owner?"

"The property is owned by the estate of a deceased manufacturer. It was rented eighteen months ago by a man named John April. The neighbors describe him as something of an eccentric. He's tall and middle-aged, with bushy hair and a little beard."

"He's an eccentric, all right," Rand agreed. "He had twenty-four clocks in the room where Jimmy's body was found."

"Clocks?"

Rand nodded. "One for each of the twenty-four time zones of the world. They were set an hour

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apart, to show the time anywhere on the planet. I suppose the location of the house in Greenwich must have given him the idea. Greenwich Mean Time is the standard for the world, of course."

Hastings pursed his lips distastefully. "Did Stephens tell you how they happened to find the body?"

"They had a phone call from a girl at three o'clock this morning. She said only that there'd been a killing at the Greenwich address and then hung up."

"The neighbors saw nothing?"

"In the middle of the night, with that fog? Not a thing."

"Find anything interesting in the house?"

"I'm going back for another look this afternoon," Rand said. "What I saw wasn't much. Cheap furnishings, probably left by the owner. The murder room was the only one of interest. Apparently it was used as a study of some sort. Stephens' people are searching it, of course."

"What about the twenty-four clocks? Did they all have the correct time?"

Rand allowed himself a slight smile. "Right to the minute. The clocks are numbered from One to Twenty-four. Clock Number One has the correct time for London, Paris and Berlin, which is the same since we adopted British Standard Time in '68. Clock Number Two is an hour later and shows the time in Athens, Jerusalem, and Cairo."

Hastings leaned back in his chair, looking unhappy. "Why should your man King be murdered in a room with twenty-four clocks?"

"I don't even know what he was doing in the house. When we discover that, we'll be a long way toward an answer."

"I want you to get to the bottom of this thing, Rand. If King was involved in anything subversive, it might endanger your whole department."

Rand rose to leave. He'd had enough of Hastings for one morning. "What's subversive about getting killed?"

"You at least must admit that the manner of his death was in extremely bad taste."

Rand turned and left the office without further comment.

He went down to the decoding room where Frank Malley was working at the blackboards. "Time to go home, Frank. The day crew can take over."

The Irishman sighed. "Not a thing yet. And I feel I'm so near!"

"What have you done so far?"

"I keep thinking it should be a modified Vigenere. That's always been a favorite with the Russians. The message uses letters instead of numbers, but I think I've figured that part of it. Only

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the first ten letters of the Russian alphabet are used. They easily transpose into the numbers one through zero. The trouble with a Vigenere, though, is that a key word or key number is needed for the solution."

Rand scanned the blackboard quickly. "What about Bermuda as the key word?"

"Tried it first thing. Nothing."

Rand had been doing Vigeneres and Nihilist ciphers while Malley was still in grade school. Somehow the look of this was different. "I think you're on the wrong track," he said. "But keep at it if you want to. I'll be back to help out the day men as soon as I can."

He went up to his office and glanced quickly through the morning's mail. But he was unable to concentrate on it, unable to think of anything but Jimmy King's outstretched body. He stood for a time at the window, watching the almost imperceptible movement of Big Ben's minute hand across the river. The fog had lifted, and was now replaced by bright May sunshine.

He phoned Inspector Stephens and learned they had just completed the autopsy on King. "As we thought, a knife wound in the side. A long slender blade that went through the heart. Perhaps something like a sword cane."

"Time of death?"

"Between two and three, as near as we can figure."

Rand hung up and pondered some more. King had left Double-C just before midnight, and two or three hours later he'd been killed in a house in Greenwich. Why had he gone there? To meet the girl who had phoned Scotland Yard?

He went out to the dead man's desk in the main office, ignoring the stares of the secretaries, and began to go through King's drawers. There were few personal items—a packet of matches from a gambling club, a few small coins, a notebook of telephone numbers. Rand paused at this last and leafed through the pages. Several girls' names were listed, with phone numbers. He was sorry he hadn't known King better outside of office hours. As it was, the names meant nothing to him.

He dropped the address book into his pocket and went back to the decoding room. "Frank, did Jimmy King ever mention any girls to you?"

"Not to me. He was all business."

Rand grunted and went over to the blackboard. "A number cipher of some sort," he decided, studying the number-groups which had now replaced the previous letter-groups. "But not necessarily a Vigenere."

"Any ideas?"

Rand smiled. "Lots of them." He reached for the chalk.

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But two hours later he gave up in disgust and left the building.

Inspector Stephens led Rand down the Greenwich hallway to the room at the end. "And this is where we found the body."

"I remember," Rand said. He gazed again over the faces of the 24 clocks, each with its own number and identifying card. "What do you think this room was used for?"

The Scotland Yard man shrugged. "A study, I suppose."

Rand glanced over the shelves of books. There was a complete set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, a number of atlases, some textbooks in forensic medicine, and even a leather-bound edition of Dickens. "What do you make of the books?" he asked Stephens.

"We've been through them. Everything but the Britannica apparently came from the sale of an estate. There's a bookplate in each one—the same bookplate. We checked it out—the name's meaningless."

Rand opened a couple of books at random, studying the faded bookplate of some long-dead collector. "Odd. They don't even seem read."

"Just for show."

"Are the clocks for show, too?" He replaced the books and turned back to Stephens.

"Any lead on the girl who phoned?"

"None," Stephens replied.

"Or the missing Mr. April?"

"Not really. The neighbors confirm that he carried a cane. Could have been the murder weapon."

Rand nodded. "Jimmy confronted April in this room and April killed him. The girl with Jimmy called Scotland Yard. Simple. If only we had April."

"He left some clothing in an upstairs closet, but nothing that can be traced. We know he was about the same size and weight as the dead man, and the neighbors put April's age at around fifty. But that's all we've got. The beard could be a fake."

Rand looked again at the 24 clocks. "Why would anyone want to know the time in every major city of the world?"

"The man was an eccentric. He lived in Greenwich, so he had twenty-four clocks."

"Perhaps," Rand said. Once more he studied the numbered cards below each clock. Some cards listed only one city, while others carried the names of several. Clock Number 5 was tagged *Karachi,* while clock Number 8 had *Canton, Hong Kong, Manila.* On clock Number 20 he found the names of *Bermuda, Caracas, Halifax.* The final clock, Number 24, said *Dakar, Dublin.*

He looked again at the card for clock Number 20, remembering the Bermuda Cipher. But after

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a time he could only sigh and walk away.

At eight o'clock that evening the girl phoned his apartment. Her voice was low and husky, and he knew at once that this was the one. "Mr. Rand?"

"Speaking."

"I was a friend of Jimmy's."

"Oh?"

"I must talk to you. I have some information about his death."

"All right."

"Where can we meet?"

"You're welcome to come up here."

"No. Your place might be watched."

"My phone might be tapped too. Did you think of that?"

"I had to take the chance. Can you meet me at Battersea Park? At the entrance to the amusement area?"

"When?"

"Is nine too soon?"

"I'll be there. How will I know you?"

She hesitated. "You'll know me."

The pleasant May weather had brought out the children and the lovers, and somehow Rand felt a bit out of place lounging against the wall of a candy-striped pavilion waiting for a girl he had never seen. Then, quite suddenly, she was there before him—and he did know her. The mouth, nose, eyes—they all belonged to Jimmy King.

"You're his sister," he said, giving words to the obvious.

She nodded. "I'm Rita. He never mentioned me?"

"Not that I remember. I'm afraid I wasn't as close to Jimmy as I might have been."

"I don't think he would have permitted it." She glanced around at the crowd of evening fun-seekers. "Is there some place we could go?"

Rand steered her up the walk to a little tea-and-sandwich shop beneath the trees. They took a table in the rear and waited until the elderly woman proprietor had served them.

"Now then, Miss King, what do you know about your brother's death?"

"Everything, I'm afraid. In a way I was the cause of it."

"You'd better tell me about it," Rand said grimly.

"Well, in the first place I'm twenty-seven—two years older than Jimmy was. Ever since college I've been pretty much on my own. Our parents died a few years back, leaving me enough money to get by on." She tossed her blonde hair as she spoke, in a gesture Rand found a bit too youthful for a woman of 27.

"Go on."

"In college I drifted into the wrong sort of crowd. My politics had always been liberal, and

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before I realized it I was involved with a Communist cell."

"No wonder Jimmy never mentioned you."

She tossed her hair again. "It could have meant his job, I suppose. But I wasn't thinking about that. I fell in love with a man named Peter Jentor, and that was the beginning of it. He was thirty-three, married, and a member of the Party. I thought it all very worldly and daring."

"You became a Communist too?"

"Not entirely, but close enough. Until I got my senses back." She sipped her tea. "I'd been seeing Peter regularly, and I soon learned that he and a man named John April were actually Russian agents, operating a spy network in London. It was something out of a thriller!"

Rand was alert now, sensing the break he'd been hoping for. "Did you ever meet John April?"

She shook her head. "I only saw him once, at a distance, with Peter. An older man, with gray hair and a little beard. He walked with a cane."

"Yes," Rand said quietly. Then, "How did you know my name?"

"Jimmy mentioned you once when we had dinner. He said he worked on codes and things, but of course he never told me any details. Then when Peter told me that the house in Greenwich was a message center for Communist agents. I realized that my lover and my brother were working directly against each other."

"This Jentor told you it was a message center? When?"

"A month or so ago. I did nothing at first, until he told me something else. Then I decided I should tell Jimmy what I knew."

"You told your brother about the house in Greenwich? When?"

"Last night. He finished work at midnight, and I was waiting for him. I drove him there, telling him what I knew on the way. He told me to wait in the car and went in alone, through the back door."

"Then what happened?"

"We both thought the place was empty, but after about fifteen minutes I heard him scream. I was terrified, but I had to find out what happened to him. I—I found him like that. Dead."

"Who else was there?" She didn't answer and he asked the question again. "It was Jentor, wasn't it? He killed your brother."

"*No!* It was John April who did it!"

"All right. Tell me the rest."

"Peter was there, but he couldn't stop April. Before he could do anything, Jimmy was dead, stabbed with April's sword cane. April ran out. He was gone before I got inside."

"What about all those clocks? What do they mean?"

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"I don't know. Peter said April was a strange man."

"So then you let Jentor escape too, before you called Scotland Yard."

"Yes," she said quietly. "I know he didn't kill my brother."

Rand reached out to grab her arm. He was afraid she would run away. "You phoned me because you felt responsible for your brother's death." Tears were forming in the corners of her eyes.

"I took him there, to that house. And now he's dead."

"If you really want to help, you'll take me to Jentor."

"No! He'd kill me."

"Not if he loves you."

"I can't!"

"Think about it." Rand studied her tear-streaked face. "Do you have any other brothers?"

"Jimmy was the youngest of four. I guess he was always my favorite."

"Where is Jentor? What else did he say to you that suddenly made you go to Jimmy?"

"I can't tell you."

"Think about it," he said. "Think about your brother's dead body." He released her arm and watched her hurry away from the table.

Frank Malley was still at the blackboards the following morning. "I thought we had something," he told Rand. "But it was a false alarm. Fool with enough combinations and you can make words out of anything."

Rand grunted and inspected the night's work with a sinking feeling. They were no closer to cracking the Bermuda Cipher than they'd been a week earlier. "Look," he said, "we always assume that five-number groups are just that length out of custom, to aid in transmission and to disguise the real length of the individual words. But suppose the five-number groups are just that—with each group standing for one word."

"You mean a code instead of a cipher?"

"It's a possibility."

"But no group is ever repeated, even in this lengthy message. Doesn't that rule out a code?"

Rand gazed at the blackboard and thought about it. "A book code," he answered finally. "A dictionary or bible code—one using different page numbers even when it was the same word. Look—the first two numbers are the page, the next two the line, and the last is the word in that line. You'll notice none of the groups ends in a zero."

"Could be," Malley admitted. "I considered a book code early on, but Jimmy tossed it out. Said the Russians wouldn't trust their whole message system between London and Moscow to a single book that could fall into British hands."

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"Still," Rand mused, "it's worth thinking about." He was remembering the room where Jimmy had died—the room his sister described as a message center. He was especially remembering the books *in it. But which one? Which one* out of all those hundreds? And he thought again about the 24 clocks, each showing a different hour of the day and night.

Rand went back to his office and sorted through the morning's mail. There was a message to call Hastings with a progress report, but just then there was no progress to report—nothing but the meeting with Jimmy's sister. He sat there instead and brooded about her. Peter Jentor had told her something—something other than the fact that the Greenwich house was a Russian message center. Whatever he'd told her had caused her to phone Jimmy almost at once.

He stared gloomily out the window. Somehow the 24 clocks were a key to the Bermuda Cipher. Jimmy had seen it right away, and had been killed. The clocks and the books, the books and the clocks. But which books? If *Bermuda* referred to clock Number 20, what then? Could the book he sought be on the shelf beneath the clock? He remembered that the books were mostly from an old estate library, mostly unread. Window dressing, Stephens had said—except for the set of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

He stared across his office at the Department's own set. A to Anno, Anno to Baltic . . .

All 24 volumes.

24.

It just might be worth one more drive out to Greenwich.

The house behind the shrubbery was as he'd left it, and he used the key that Inspector Stephens had given him. Somewhere above him a bird chirped, but otherwise the street was quiet in the May sunshine. The 24 clocks were still there, still humming their messages, but this time he barely glanced at them. He went at once to the set of The Britannica and pulled out Volume 20. He remembered the numbers in the first five-digit group: 46093. Page 46, ninth line, third word.

Chinese.

He stared at it, holding his breath.

Maybe. Just maybe.

He got on the phone and called Frank Malley at Double-C. "Frank, I'm out at the house where Jimmy King was killed. I think the book we're looking for might be an edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Can you read me a few number-groups? From the beginning?"

"Sure. 46093."

"I remembered that. What's next?"

"14871."

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"Page fourteen, line eighty-seven—that'll be in the second column on the page—first word."

"Got it?"

"Yes. So far it's *Chinese agents.* Keep going."

Five minutes later they had enough to be sure: *Chinese agents arriving London to establish power base for action in Middle East.* "All right," Rand said. "That's enough. Jump in a car and bring the rest of the message out here with you—I know our office Britannica is a different edition. We'll have to work here."

"I'm on my way," Malley said.

Rand hung up and lit a cigarette. The Russians, he decided, must have a great deal of patience these days to go back to using a book code. Even with the Britannica, their choice of words was limited. But the method did have the advantage of defying solution unless the precise code book was known. With 24 volumes of the encyclopedia from which to choose, detection was almost impossible.

And the clocks were merely that—24 clocks. The secret of the code was on the cards tacked beneath each clock. If the first word of the message, in Russian plaintext, was *Hong Kong,* clock Number 8, that meant Volume 8 of the Britannica was to be used. *Bermuda* meant clock Number 20, and therefore Volume 20. Of course they were limited to the first 99 pages of each volume, but with 24 volumes from which to choose, almost any message could be sent.

There was just one thing he needed now—Peter Jentor and the final key to Jimmy's killing. He picked up the phone and dialed Rita King's number, hoping she was there.

"Hello?"

"This is Rand, Miss King. It's very important. Do you think you could meet me at the house in Greenwich, and bring Jentor along?"

"He'd never come!"

"I think he would, if you talk to him. Tell him we just want April. If he turns April in, we'll see that he gets a break."

"Rand—"

"What is it?"

"I'm afraid for you. I've already caused Jimmy's death."

"How? What did you tell him?"

"I—"

"Tell me!" he insisted.

"Peter said—" She stopped, and he could hear her heavy breathing.

"What did he say? What?"

Then the words came out in a flood. "He was drunk one night and he told me there was a spy in Jimmy's department. He told me that John April was really someone from Double-C."

There was a noise behind him at the door, and Rand whirled

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to face the intruder. Frank Malley stood in the doorway with his brief case. "Well," he announced, "here I am!"

Seated opposite each other at the little desk, Rand and Malley decoded the entire message. Working together it took just under an hour, and when they finished, Rand read through the lengthy message. "*Chinese agents arriving London to establish power base for action in Middle East. Chinese freighter bound for Mediterranean with cargo of rockets. Agents met Arab government officials in Aden two weeks ago. Contact regular sources for . . .*"

Rand read on to the end of the message, then tossed it to Malley. "Hastings should be happy to see this one."

"Damn right!" the Irishman replied.

Rand leaned back in his chair. "Frank, how many people are there in the Department now?"

"In Double-C? Around fifty, I guess. You certainly know better than I do."

"Any problems? Any security risks?"

"How would I know? You're sure edgy today. What's up? With the message solved, you should be happy."

"It's Jimmy's murder. I was talking to his sister when you came in."

"You sure jumped a mile! Bad nerves."

Rand nodded. "She's coming over here. Maybe with a man named Peter Jentor." He watched Malley's face, but there was no change in expression.

A few moments later they heard a car stop in the street outside. "Someone's coming now," Malley said.

Rand nodded and slipped the small pistol from his pocket. After a moment the front door opened and two sets of footsteps approached down the hallway. A handsome dark-haired young man of about 30 entered, closely followed by Rita King. "I brought him," she said. "Who's this?"

Rand kept the pistol out of sight below the desk top. "Frank Malley from my office. He worked closely with your brother." He shifted his gaze to the dark-haired young man. "And you would be Peter Jentor."

"That's right." Jentor brought his hands into view, and Rand saw the slender bamboo cane for the first time. His grip tightened on the pistol. "Rita said you wanted to make a deal."

"Not exactly a deal. I want John April."

"April's gone. Out of the country."

"Is he the one who killed Jimmy King?"

Jentor hesitated only an instant. "Yes. April killed him."

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"Who is John April?" Rand asked.

"A Russian agent. I don't know any more."

"Why did he kill Jimmy King?"

"King came here with Rita. He found this place, and April had to kill him."

"Why didn't you take the volumes of the encyclopedia with you?"

"The neighbors would have seen us."

Rand pressed his advantage. "In the middle of the night, in that fog? No, Jentor, the books had to be left here because there was only you to carry them away. No April, only you."

"It was April," Jentor insisted again. "He's one of your own people, Rand. One of the Double-C people."

"You told Rita that, and she brought Jimmy out here. She had a loyalty to him that she didn't have to her country."

Rita let out a soft sob, and Jentor moved forward a step to comfort her. "April killed him," Jentor repeated.

But Rand was shaking his head. "No, you did, Jentor. Only you. April couldn't have killed him because Jimmy King and John April were the same person. King was the spy in my department, but his sister never knew it."

It was then that Jentor bared his sword cane and lunged forward.

Rand's shot clipped him in the shoulder, but Jentor might have found his target with the sword cane if Inspector Stephens had not appeared in the doorway and tackled the lunging man with a flying leap. After that it was over in moments, and Jentor was handcuffed by one of Stephens' men.

"A timely arrival," Rand told the Inspector. "Thanks."

"My man watching the house called me. He said there was a lot of traffic going in."

It was Frank Malley who spoke then. "Good Lord, Rand, were you serious about Jimmy being a Red spy?"

"All too serious, I'm afraid." Rand put the pistol away as one of the detectives bandaged the flesh wound in Jentor's shoulder. "Rita was told they had a spy in my department. We have a lot of people there, but consider the evidence. April's clothes showed he was the same size as Jimmy. You told me yourself, Frank, that it was Jimmy who discouraged the idea of a book code as a solution to the Bermuda Cipher. April's gray hair and beard were an easy disguise, and no one ever saw him close up, including his sister. And consider the name—April. Jimmy King was the youngest of four brothers. With his interest in numbers and such, April—the fourth month—is exactly the kind of

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pseudonym he'd pick."

Rita spoke up from the sidelines. "I can't believe it. If Jimmy was working with them all the time, why would Peter kill him?"

Rand turned to the handcuffed man. "Want to tell us now?"

The dark-haired man touched his bandaged shoulder. "Why not? You know it all, anyway. Rita told him about the place and brought him out here, not realizing that Jimmy was April. He went along with it, not wanting her to know the truth, but when he came in here he got the crazy idea of selling us out to the British. He was going to kill me with his sword cane, expose the message center, and become a hero. From the beginning he was only in it for the money, and suddenly the money on the other side looked better. We struggled and I killed him in self-defense."

"We'll let the courts decide that," Stephens said. "Let's go."

Rita paused at the door and turned to Rand. "Did you know it all the time?" she asked.

"Not all the time, no. But ever since I talked to you I was wondering what Jimmy was doing in here for fifteen minutes before you heard his scream. The facts didn't quite fit together the way you told it, but they did fit nicely if Jimmy was the spy, having a final confrontation with Jentor."

"I lost them all, didn't I?" she said. "Jimmy and Peter both."

Rand took a final look at the clocks. "Come on," he said, taking her arm. "It's time we were going."

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A NICE PLACE TO STAY

by NEDRA TYRE

ALL MY LIFE I'VE WANTED A nice place to stay. I don't mean anything grand, just a small room with the walls freshly painted and a few neat pieces of furniture and a window to catch the sun so that two or three pot plants could grow. That's what I've always dreamed of. I didn't yearn for love or money or nice clothes, though I was a pretty enough girl and pretty clothes would have made me prettier—not that I mean to brag.

Things fell on my shoulders when I was fifteen. That was when Mama took sick, and keeping house and looking after Papa and my two older brothers—and of course nursing Mama—became my responsibility. Not long after that Papa lost the farm and we moved to town. I don't like to think of the house we lived in near the C & R railroad tracks, though I guess we were lucky to have a roof over our heads—it was the worst days of the Depression and a lot of people didn't even have a roof, even one that leaked, plink, plonk; in a heavy rain there weren't enough pots and pans and vegetable bowls to set around to catch all the water.

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Mama was the sick one but it was Papa who died first—living in town didn't suit him. By then my brothers had married and Mama and I moved into two back rooms that looked onto an alley and everybody's garbage cans and dump heaps. My brothers pitched in and gave me enough every month for Mama's and my barest expenses even though their wives grumbled and complained.

I tried to make Mama comfortable. I catered to her every whim and fancy. I loved her. All the same I had another reason to keep her alive as long as possible. While she breathed I knew I had a place to stay. I was terrified of what would happen to me when Mama died. I had no high school diploma and no experience at outside work and I knew my sisters-in-law wouldn't take me in or let my brothers support me once Mama was gone.

Then Mama drew her last breath with a smile of thanks on her face for what I had done.

Sure enough, Norine and Thelma, my brothers' wives, put their feet down. I was on my own from then on. So that scared feeling of wondering where I could lay my head took over in my mind and never left me.

I had some respite when Mr. Williams, a widower twenty-four years older than me, asked me to marry him. I took my vows seriously. I meant to cherish him and I did. But that house we lived in! Those walls couldn't have been dirtier if they'd been smeared with soot and the plumbing was stubborn as a mule. My left foot stayed sore from having to kick the pipe underneath the kitchen sink to get the water to run through.

Then Mr. Williams got sick and had to give up his shoe repair shop that he ran all by himself. He had a small savings account and a few of those twenty-five-dollar government bonds and drew some disability insurance until the policy ran out in something like six months.

I did everything I could to make him comfortable and keep him cheerful. Though I did all the laundry I gave him clean sheets and clean pajamas every third day and I think it was by my will power alone that I made a begonia bloom in that dark back room Mr. Williams stayed in. I even pestered his two daughters and told them they ought to send their father some get-well cards and they did once or twice. Every now and then when there were a few pennies extra I'd buy cards and scrawl signatures nobody could have read and mailed them to Mr. Williams to make him think some of his former customers were remembering him and wishing him well.

Of course when Mr. Williams died his daughters were johnny-

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on-the-spot to see that they got their share of the little bit that tumbledown house brought. I didn't begrudge them—I'm not one to argue with human nature.

I hate to think about all those hardships I had after Mr. Williams died. The worst of it was finding somewhere to sleep; it all boiled down to having a place to stay. Because somehow you can manage not to starve. There are garbage cans to dip into—you'd be surprised how wasteful some people are and how much good food they throw away. Or if it was right after the garbage trucks had made their collections and the cans were empty I'd go into a supermarket and pick, say, at the cherries pretending I was selecting some to buy. I didn't slip their best ones into my mouth. I'd take either those so ripe that they should have been thrown away or those that weren't ripe enough and shouldn't have been put out for people to buy. I might snitch a withered cabbage leaf or a few pieces of watercress or a few of those small round tomatoes about the size of hickory nuts—I never can remember their right name. I wouldn't make a pig of myself, just eat enough to ease my hunger. So I managed. As I say, you don't have to starve.

The only work I could get hardly ever paid me anything beyond room and board. I wasn't a practical nurse, though I knew how to take care of sick folks, and the people hiring me would say that since I didn't have the training and qualifications I couldn't expect much. All they really wanted was for someone to spend the night with Aunt Myrtle or Cousin Kate or Mama or Daddy; no actual duties were demanded of me, they said, and they really didn't think my help was worth anything except meals and a place to sleep. The arrangements were pretty makeshift. Half the time I wouldn't have a place to keep my things, not that I had any clothes to speak of, and sometimes I'd sleep on a cot in the hall outside the patient's room or on some sort of contrived bed in the patient's room.

I cherished every one of those sick people, just as I had cherished Mama and Mr. Williams. I didn't want them to die. I did everything I knew to let them know I was interested in their welfare—first for their sakes, and then for mine, so I wouldn't have to go out and find another place to stay.

Well, now, I've made out my case for the defense, a term I never thought I'd have to use personally, so now I'll make out the case for the prosecution.

I stole.

I don't like to say it, but I was a thief.

I'm not light-fingered. I didn't want a thing that belonged to

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anybody else. But there came a time when I felt forced to steal. I had to have some things. My shoes fell apart. I needed some stockings and underclothes. And when I'd ask a son or a daughter or a cousin or a niece for a little money for those necessities they acted as if I was trying to blackmail them. They reminded me that I wasn't qualified as a practical nurse, that I might even get into trouble with the authorities if they found I was palming myself off as a practical nurse—which I wasn't and they knew it. Anyway, they said that their terms were only bed and board.

So I began to take things—small things that had been pushed into the backs of drawers or stored high on shelves in boxes—things that hadn't been used or worn for years and probably would never be used again. I made my biggest haul at Mrs. Bick's where there was an attic full of trunks stuffed with clothes and doodads from the twenties all the way back to the nineties—uniforms, ostrich fans, Spanish shawls, beaded bags. I sneaked out a few of these at a time and every so often sold them to a place called Way Out, Hippie Clothiers.

I tried to work out the exact amount I got for selling something. Not, I know, that you can make up for theft. But, say, I got a dollar for a feather boa belonging to Mrs. Bick: well, then I'd come back and work at a job that the cleaning woman kept putting off, like waxing the hall upstairs or polishing the andirons or getting the linen closet in order.

All the same I *was* stealing—not everywhere I stayed, not even in most places, but when I had to I stole. I admit it.

But I didn't steal that silver box.

I was as innocent as a baby where that box was concerned. So when that policeman came toward me grabbing at the box I stepped aside, and maybe I even gave him the push that sent him to his death. He had no business acting like that when that box was mine, whatever Mrs. Crowe's niece argued.

Fifty thousand nieces couldn't have made it not mine.

Anyway, the policeman was dead and though I hadn't wanted him dead I certainly hadn't wished him well. And then I got to thinking: well, I didn't steal Mrs. Crowe's box but I had stolen other things and it was the mills of God grinding exceeding fine, as I once heard a preacher say, and I was being made to pay for the transgressions that had caught up with me.

Surely I can make a little more sense out of what happened than that, though I never was exactly clear in my own mind about

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everything that happened.

Mrs. Crowe was the most appreciative person I ever worked for. She was bedridden and could barely move. I don't think the registered nurse on daytime duty considered it part of her job to massage Mrs. Crowe. So at night I would massage her, and that pleased and soothed her. She thanked me for every small thing I did—when I fluffed her pillow, when I'd put a few drops of perfume on her earlobes, when I'd straighten the wrinkled bedcovers.

I had a little joke. I'd pretend I could tell fortunes and I'd take Mrs. Crowe's hand and tell her she was going to have a wonderful day but she must beware of a handsome b l o n d stranger—or some such foolishness that would make her laugh. She didn't sleep well and it seemed to give her pleasure to talk to me most of the night about her childhood or her dead husband.

She kept getting weaker and weaker and two nights before she died she said she wished she could do something for me but that when she became an invalid she had signed over everything to her niece. Anyway, Mrs. Crowe hoped I'd take her silver box. I thanked her. It pleased me that she liked me well enough to give me the box. I didn't have any real use for it. It would have made a nice trinket box, but I didn't have any trinkets. The box seemed to be Mrs. Crowe's fondest possession. She kept it on the table beside her and her eyes lighted up every time she looked at it. She might have been a little girl first seeing a brand-new baby doll early on a Christmas morning.

So when Mrs. Crowe died and the niece on whom I set eyes for the first time dismissed me, I gathered up what little I had and took the box and left. I didn't go to Mrs. Crowe's funeral. The paper said it was private and I wasn't invited. A n y w a y , I wouldn't have had a n y t h i n g suitable to wear.

I still had a few dollars left over from those things I'd sold to the hippie place called Way Out, so I paid a week's rent for a room that was the worst I'd ever stayed in.

It was freezing cold and no heat came up to the third floor where I was. In that room with falling plaster and buckling floorboards and darting roaches, I sat wearing every stitch I owned, with a sleazy blanket and a faded quilt draped around me waiting for the heat to rise, when in swept Mrs. Crowe's niece in a fur coat and a fur hat and shiny leather boots up to her knees. Her face was beet-red from anger when she started telling me that she had traced me through a p r i v a t e detective and I was to give her back the heirloom I had stolen.

Her statement made me forget

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the precious little bit I knew of the English language. I couldn't say a word, and she kept on screaming that if I returned the box immediately no criminal charge would be made against me. Then I got back my voice and I said that box was mine and that Mrs. Crowe had wanted me to have it, and she asked if I had any proof or if there were any witnesses to the gift, and I told her that when I was given a present I said thank you, that I didn't ask for proof and witnesses, and that nothing could make me part with Mrs. Crowe's box.

The niece stood there breathing hard, in and out, almost counting her breaths like somebody doing an exercise to get control of herself.

"You'll see," she yelled, and then she left.

The room was colder than ever and my teeth chattered.

Not long afterward I heard heavy steps clumping up the stairway. I realized that the niece had carried out her threat and that the police were after me.

I was panic-stricken. I chased around the room like a rat with a cat after it. Then I thought that if the police searched my room and couldn't find the box it might give me time to decide what to do. I grabbed the box out of the top dresser drawer and scurried down the back hall. I snatched the back door open. I think what I intended to do was run down the back steps and hide the box somewhere, underneath a bush or maybe in a garbage can.

Those back steps were steep and rose almost straight up for three stories and they were flimsy and covered with ice.

I started down. My right foot slipped. The handrail saved me. I clung to it with one hand and to the silver box with the other hand and picked and chose my way across the patches of ice.

When I was midway I heard my name shrieked. I looked around to see a big man leaping down the steps after me. I never saw such anger on a person's face. Then he was directly behind me and reached out to snatch the box.

I swerved to escape his grasp and he cursed me. Maybe I pushed him. I'm not sure—not really.

Anyway, he slipped and fell down and down and down, and then after all that falling he was absolutely still. The bottom step was beneath his head like a pillow and the rest of his body was spreadeagled on the brick walk.

Then almost like a pet that wants to follow its master, the silver box jumped from my hand and bounced down the steps to land beside the man's left ear.

My brain was numb. I felt paralyzed. Then I screamed.

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Tenants from that house and the houses next door and across the alley pushed windows open and flung doors open to see what the commotion was about, and then some of them began to run toward the back yard. The policeman who was the dead man's partner—I guess you'd call him that—ordered them to keep away

After a while more police came and they took the dead man's body and drove me to the station where I was locked up.

From the very beginning I didn't take to that young lawyer they assigned to me. There wasn't anything exactly that I could put my finger on. I just felt uneasy with him. His last name was Stanton. He had a first name of course, but he didn't tell me what it was; he said he wanted me to call him Bat like all his friends did.

He was always smiling and reassuring me when there wasn't anything to smile or be reassured about, and he ought to have known it all along instead of filling me with false hope.

All I could think was that I was thankful Mama and Papa and Mr. Williams were dead and that my shame wouldn't bring shame on them.

"It's going to be all right," the lawyer kept saying right up to the end, and then he claimed to be indignant when I was found guilty of resisting arrest and of manslaughter and theft or robbery—there was the biggest hullabaloo as to whether I was guilty of theft or robbery. Not that I was guilty of either, at least in this particular instance, but no one would believe me.

You would have thought it was the lawyer being sentenced instead of me, the way he carried on. He called it a terrible miscarriage of justice and said we might as well be back in the eighteenth century when they hanged children.

Well, that was an exaggeration, if ever there was one; nobody was being hung and nobody was a child. That policeman had died and I had had a part in it. Maybe I had pushed him. I couldn't be sure. In my heart I really hadn't meant him any harm. I was just scared. But he was dead all the same. And as far as stealing went, I hadn't stolen the box but I had stolen other things more than once.

And then it happened. It was a miracle. All my life I'd dreamed of a nice room of my own, a comfortable place to stay. And that's exactly what I got.

The room was on the small side but it had everything I needed in it, even a wash basin with hot and cold running water, and the walls were freshly painted, and they let me choose whether I wanted a wing chair with a chintz

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slipcover or a modern Danish armchair. I even got to decide what color bedspread I preferred. The window looked out on a beautiful lawn edged with shrubbery, and the matron said I'd be allowed to go to the greenhouse and select some pot plants to keep in my room. The next day I picked out a white gloxinia and some russet chrysanthemums.

I didn't mind the bars at the windows at all. Why, this day and age some of the finest mansions have barred windows to keep burglars out.

The meals—I simply couldn't believe there was such delicious food in the world. The woman who supervised their preparation had embezzled the funds of one of the largest catering companies in the state after working herself up from assistant cook to treasurer.

The other inmates were very friendly and most of them had led the most interesting lives. Some of the ladies occasionally used words that you usually see written only on fences or printed on sidewalks before the cement dries, but when they were scolded they apologized. Every now and then somebody would get angry with someone and there would be a little scratching or hair pulling, but it never got too bad. There was a choir—I can't sing but I love music—and they gave a concert every Tuesday morning at chapel, and Thursday night was movie night. There wasn't any admission charge. All you did was go in and sit down anywhere you pleased.

We all had a special job and I was assigned to the infirmary. The doctor and nurse both complimented me. The doctor said that I should have gone into professional nursing, that I gave confidence to the patients and helped them get well. I don't know about that but I've had years of practice with sick people and I like to help anybody who feels bad.

I was so happy that sometimes I couldn't sleep at night. I'd get up and click on the light and look at the furniture and the walls. It was hard to believe I had such a pleasant place to stay. I'd remember supper that night, how I'd gone back to the steam table for a second helping of asparagus with lemon and herb sauce, and I compared my plenty with those terrible times when I had slunk into supermarkets and nibbled overripe fruit and raw vegetables to ease my hunger.

Then one day here came that lawyer, not even at regular visiting hours, bouncing around congratulating me that my appeal had been upheld, or whatever the term was, and that I was as free as a bird to leave right that minute.

He told the matron she could send my belongings later and he dragged me out front where TV

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cameras and newspaper reporters were waiting.

As soon as the cameras began whirring and the photographers began to aim, the lawyer kissed me on the cheek and pinned a flower on me. He made a speech saying that a terrible miscarriage of justice had been rectified. He had located people who testified that Mrs. Crowe had given me the box—she had told the gardener and the cleaning woman. They hadn't wanted to testify because they didn't want to get mixed up with the police, but the lawyer had persuaded them in the cause of justice and humanity to come forward and make statements.

The lawyer had also looked into the personnel record of the dead policeman and had learned that he had been judged emotionally unfit for his job, and the psychiatrist had warned the Chief of Police that something awful might happen either to the man himself or to a suspect unless he was relieved of his duties.

All the time the lawyer was talking into the microphones he had latched onto me like I was a three-year-old that might run away, and I just stood and stared. Then when he had finished his speech about me the reporters told him that like his grandfather and his uncle he was sure to end up as governor but at a much earlier age.

At that the lawyer gave a big grin in front of the camera and waved goodbye and pushed me into his car.

I was terrified. The nice place I'd found to stay in wasn't mine any longer. My old nightmare was back—wondering how I could manage to eat and how much stealing I'd have to do to live from one day to the next.

The cameras and reporters had followed us.

A photographer asked me to turn down the car window beside me, and I overheard two men way in the back of the crowd talking. My ears are sharp. Papa always said I could hear thunder three states away. Above the congratulations and bubbly talk around me I heard one of those men in back say, "This is a bit too much, don't you think? Our Bat is showing himself the champion of the Senior Citizen now. He's already copped the teeny-boppers and the under thirties using methods that ought to have disbarred him. He should have made the gardener and cleaning woman testify at the beginning, and from the first he should have checked into the policeman's history. There ought never to have been a case at all, much less a conviction. But Bat wouldn't have got any publicity that way. He had to do it in his own devious, spectacular fashion." The other man just kept nodding and saying

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after every sentence, "You're damned right."

Then we drove off and I didn't dare look behind me because I was so heartbroken over what I was leaving.

The lawyer took me to his office. He said he hoped I wouldn't mind a little excitement for the next few days. He had mapped out some public appearances for me. The next morning I was to be on an early television show. There was nothing to be worried about. He would be right beside me to help me just as he had helped me throughout my trouble. All that I had to say on the TV program was that I owed my freedom to him.

I guess I looked startled or bewildered because he hurried on to say that I hadn't been able to pay him a fee but that now I was able to pay him back—not in money but in letting the public know about how he was the champion of the underdog.

I said I had been told that the court furnished lawyers free of charge to people who couldn't pay, and he said that was right, but his point was that I could repay him now by telling people all that he had done for me. Then he said the main thing was to talk over our next appearance on TV. He wanted to coach me in what I was going to say, but first he would go into his partner's office and tell him to take all the incoming calls and handle the rest of his appointments.

When the door closed after him I thought that he was right. I did owe my freedom to him. He was to blame for it. The smart alec. The upstart. Who asked him to butt in and snatch me out of my pretty room and the work I loved and all that delicious food?

It was the first time in my life I knew what it meant to despise someone.

I hated him.

Before, when I was convicted of manslaughter, there was a lot of talk about malice aforethought and premeditated crime.

There wouldn't be any argument this time.

I hadn't wanted any harm to come to that policeman. But I did mean harm to come to this lawyer.

I grabbed up a letter opener from his desk and ran my finger along the blade and felt how sharp it was. I waited behind the door and when he walked through I gathered all my strength and stabbed him. Again and again and again.

Now I'm back where I want to be—in a nice place to stay.

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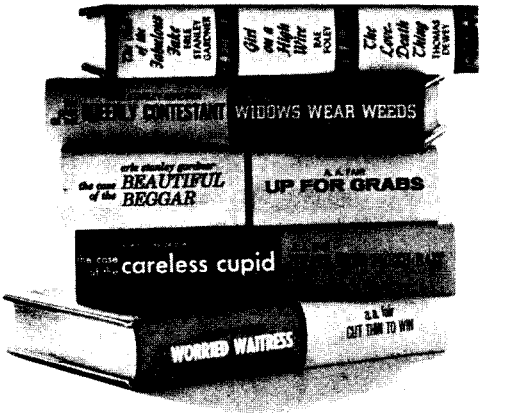

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